Season of Creation 6

Water Justice

Climate change is supercharging the weather. We are seeing an increase in droughts and flooding in different parts of Southern Africa. Cape Town suffered from a three-year long drought, the worst in 100 years. The government declared "Day Zero" – the day when the taps would be turned off and all residents forced to queue for 20 litres of water per person. In this context the Church was forced to consider the value of water. A Water Justice Conference was organized at which Bishop Ellinah from Swaziland shared the impact of drought on her country.

This image reflects the findings of the conference, there are two streams which are important for us as Christians: "Water is sacred" and "Water Justice"

"Water is sacred" As Anglicans, water is sacred, we are baptized into the family of God through the waters of baptism and we also partake of bread, water and wine at our Eucharist celebration. Water is mentioned 722 in our Scriptures. In this image we see the water on the altar as a symbol of the sacredness of water. Bishop Ellinah is watering a tree, which many bishops are now encouraging at confirmation and baptism, that young people should plant a tree as a symbol of their spiritual growth

"Water Justice". As people of faith we are committed to strive for water for all. In this image we see the lack of safe sanitation for many as well as the challenge for those who have to walk long distances to fetch clean water. We also see the plastic pollution which is now clogging our rivers as well as the alien plants which need to be removed.

This Season of Creation let us celebrate the sacredness of water and work for water justice for all.

Mash, R.
Season of Creation 6
Anglican Church of Southern Africa
Environmental Network
2018

FOREWORD

Our moral opportunity on Climate Change

Hurricanes, monsoons and other types of extreme weather are a part of life on earth for many. The trouble is that climate change is loading the dice by intensifying storms and making rain patterns less predictable. Climate change is the human thumb on the scale, pushing us toward disaster. It is not a distant danger — it is already with us. As we continue to burn fossil fuels, its effects will only grow.

As people of faith, we don't just state our beliefs — we live them out. One belief is that we find purpose and joy in loving our neighbours. Another is that we are charged by our creator with taking good care of his creation. The moral crisis of climate change is an opportunity to find purpose and joy, and to respond to our creator's charge. Reducing the causes of climate change is essential to the life of faith. It is a way to love our neighbour and to steward the gift of creation.

Different expressions of the Christian faith are freshly united around the need to care for our common home. The Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox Churches have come together with the World Council of Churches to celebrate a monthlong Season of Creation. During this season, people all around the globe pray and act to address climate change and to protect the earth. People of faith have a unique call to address the causes of climate change. Let us act together in ways that will safeguard our shared gift of creation — and the lives of those who will inherit it from us.

Archbishop Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this Season of Creation we explore five themes:

Each section contains sermon notes, liturgical materials and a fact sheet.

Sermon on Stewardship – Rev Canon Dr Claire Nye Hunter

Sermon on Water – Rev Doug Kirkpatrick

Sermon on Land – Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya

Sermon on Waste – Bishop Geoff Davies

Sermon on Biodiversity – Rev Tim Gray

Front cover illustration – Dr Bob Mash

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More resources are available on www.seasonofcreation.org

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Week 1	Stewardship	Genesis 1: 26-31 Genesis 2: 1-15	Psalm 24	Acts 17:24-28	Matthew 21:33-46
Week 2	Water	Jeremiah 2: 1-13	Psalm 107: 33-38	Hebrews 10: 19-25	Matthew 3: 13-17
Week 3	Land	Exodus 23: 10-13	Psalm 65: 1-13	James 5: 4-14	Matthew 20: 1-16
Week 4	Waste	Isaiah 24: 1-13	Psalm 74: 1-23	2 Corinthians 5:14-17	John 6:1-15
Week 5	Biodiversity	Numbers 22: 22-35	Psalm 104: 1-30	Colossians 1: 15-23	Luke 6: 43 - 49

The Five Movements of the Liturgy

The following five movements form the order of the liturgy: God gathers us, Service of the Word, Responding to the Word, Service at the Table and Commissioning.

- **The Gathering:** The congregation is welcomed, and the theme of the service is introduced. The penitence can be positioned here, or it may follow the sermon.
- **The Proclamation of God's word:** Here the word of God is read and preached. The affirmation of our Faith can be an important part of the Proclamation.
- **Responding to God's word:** Prayers of the People are included here. Creative responses such as drama, liturgical dance or short video clips can be used. The penitence may follow the word.

  The peace may be shared according to custom
- **Celebrating at the Table:** Natural elements can be used, either a whole loaf or small rolls. This could be baked by a family. Local wine can be used.
- **Sending out:** Post Communion prayers, prayers of commitment on the theme of the day and a blessing.

FIRST EUCHARISTIC PRAYER FOR THE SEASON OF CREATION

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to the Lord,
our God of all of Creation.
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

You spoke the Word and all that is in heaven and on the earth, all things, came to be. Your Spirit hovered over the primal elements, and you brought forth life in forms innumerable, including this our fragile earth, and we amongst its inhabitants.

As our past is in you, so our hope for the future rests with you. As we have turned from your way, so we turn again to the warmth of your love. Through you all things are brought to new life.

And now we give you thanks for the glories of your creation given into our care, and for the opportunities we have to share that richness with all your people

And so with the wonders of creation and the songs of praise of all your creatures both in heaven and on earth we praise you now and forever saying:

Holy, holy...

In the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, work of human hands, gift of our earth, and gave thanks to God. He broke the bread to speak to us of the breaking of his body upon the cross. He gave it to his friends and said:

Take and eat, for this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

He took the wine, work of human hands, gift of our earth, and gave thanks to God, Creator. He poured out the wine to speak to us of the pouring out of his blood. He gave it to his friends saying:

This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for all creation for the forgiveness of sins. Every time you drink of the wine, do this in remembrance of me.

So we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again.

Therefore God, we who seek your reconciliation; we who need reconciliation one with another; we who hope for reconciliation with all creation, draw close to this mystery.

In being broken, poured out and buried, life sprang forth again. In the breaking, there is an opening up; in the pouring out, there are the roots of sharing; in death and burial, there is the seed of the new life to come.

As we look in our world, in our lives, and in our hearts, for his second coming, keep us close to this vision that we have seen. Through the giving in the bread and wine, reconcile us to our world. Send upon us, and upon all your creation, the life-giving Spirit who first moved upon the waters of the deep. Stir in us the creative and redeem the destructive. Unite us with you through the body and blood of your Son, your Word made flesh.

By whom, and with whom and in whom, in the unity of your Creative Spirit, with all that has been, is, and will be in your universe, we stand before you and worship you, God of all, in songs of everlasting praise,

Blessing and honour and glory and power be yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer etc.

Final Blessing

Go out into the world rejoicing,
and encounter the Creator who waits to meet you there;
Rejoice in its richness and diversity and live as those who praise God for its bounty;
and the blessing of the Creator God,
the Eternal Father, the Risen Son and the Promised Holy Spirit
bless you that you might be a blessing to others today and always

Amen

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER FROM "CELEBRATING SUNDAY"

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Worship and praise belong to you, Source of all being. Your power invigorates, your presence sustains and your love restores our broken world. You are unceasingly at work: bringing order from chaos, creating, restoring, and filling emptiness with life. In raising Christ from the dead you usher in the dawn of a new age.

Your Spirit is fire in us, your breath is power to purge our sin and warm our hearts to love. As children of your redeeming

purpose, freed by Christ whose resurrection opens the gate of life, we offer you our praise, with angels and archangels and the whole company of earth and heaven, singing the hymn of your unending glory:

Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The Risen Lord was recognised in the breaking of the bread, the fearful disciples received a blessing of peace, and the weary fishermen found a ready welcome on the lakeshore. To them all Christ renewed the pledge of his presence and the promise of new birth in the Spirit.

Before he was given up to suffering and death, recalling the night of Israel's release when slaves walked free, at supper with his disciples, Jesus took bread and offered you thanks. He broke the bread, and gave it to them, saying: "Take, eat. This is my Body: it is broken for you." After supper, he took the cup, he offered you thanks, and gave it to them saying: "Drink this, all of you. This is my Blood of the new covenant; it is poured out for you, and for all, that sins may be forgiven. Do this to remember me."

And so, remembering all that was done for us: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection and ascension, longing for Christ's coming in glory, and presenting to you these gifts your earth has formed and human hands have made, we acclaim you, O Christ:

Dying, you destroyed our death.
Rising, you restored our life.
Christ Jesus, come in glory!

Send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts of bread and wine, that they may be to us the Body and the Blood of your Christ. Grant that we, burning with your Spirit's power, may be a people of hope, justice and love.

Giver of Life, draw us together in the Body of Christ, and in the fullness of time gather us with all your people into the joy of our true eternal home.

Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, we worship you our God and Creator in voices of unending praise.

Amen.

Eucharistic Prayer from "Celebrating Sunday" ACSA

Week One: Stewardship Guardians of the earth

Genesis 1: 26-31 and Gen 2: 1-15	God placed Adam and Eve in the garden planet to work it and take care of it
Psalm 24	The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it. We do not own it.
Acts 17:24-28	Our Creator God is the Lord of heaven and Earth. The Earth is filled with the presence of God, not only the church building.
Matthew 21:33-46	God the landowner lets us use His vineyard- will we be like the tenants who want to grab the harvest and keep it all for ourselves?

COLLECT

Lord God,
Giver and sustainer of life,
You call us to responsibility and to care for your creation:
Help us to respond to your call to be keepers and healers of the Earth
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SERMON

Genesis 1:26-31 and Gen 2:1-15

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1); "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it" (Ps 24:1). As the Creator, God has absolute rights of ownership over all things as everything belongs to Him. To miss starting here is like a schoolboy misaligning the top button of his shirt - nothing else will ever line up. Only when we fully grasp this fact, can we begin to make sense of our role as God's stewards.

The earth does not belong to us – it belongs to God! We (humans) and all other living creatures also belong to God! The earth is not ours by right – it is a gift from God; a home in which we live and find food, and one which we share with the rest of creation. But with this gift, comes responsibility. In the first creation narrative in Genesis 1, God instructed humans to "rule (have dominion) over the fish, birds, livestock, every living creature and the earth" and to ..."fill the earth and subdue it". In Gen 1:26, 28 the word for dominion (radda) in Hebrew means kingly authority, and the king not only rules, he is responsible for the long term good of his kingdom.

However, dominion has come to be understood as domination. This Scripture has been used to justify abuse of the earth. Since humans have been given a mandate to "rule" over the earth, then it is believed that we have absolute authority over creation. Nature is a resource for humans to benefit from economically no matter the environmental impacts. This "dominion theology" has been used to justify colonialism and rampant capitalism. It has allowed christians to chop down tropical forests to grow soya for cattle feed and to pollute rivers with acid mine drainage as we dig for gold.

Undergirded by this theology in the last fifty years, wild animals and plant species have declined by 58% due to unsustainable agriculture, fisheries, mining and other human activities that contribute to habitat loss and degradation, overexploitation, climate change and pollution. Increasingly people are victims too of the deteriorating state of nature. Living systems keep the air breathable and water drinkable and provide nutritious food.[ii]

To counter this "theology of dominion" Christians have increasingly turned to the second Creation narrative in Genesis 2. In verse 15, humans were placed in the Garden of Eden and instructed to "work it and take care of it; to till it and keep it". In other words, God has given us the responsibility to act as stewards of his creation – to care for, manage, oversee and protect all that God owns. This does not give us free license to exploit it and abuse it! We are stewards of that which belongs to God and we are under his authority as we administer his affairs. It surely puts things in their proper perspective – and highlights a central aspect of our calling and purpose in life! Clearly one of the fundamental reasons human beings were placed on the earth is to care for and preserve all of God's creation (which includes animals, water, land, minerals, plant life, indeed the entire environment). To think that God has entrusted all he has made into our care- what an honour and a privilege! As stewards of God's earth, we need to act in the owner's best interests, treating his 'property' with respect. We must ensure that we preserve, sustain, nurture, care for and use the resources of the earth wisely. One day we will have to give account and be answerable to God of how we have treated His earth.

"Christians believe that this world belongs to God by creation, redemption and sustenance, and that he has entrusted it to humankind, made in his image and responsible to him, we are in the position of *stewards, tenants, curators, trustees or guardians*, whether or not we acknowledge this responsibility. Stewardship implies caring management, not selfish exploitation, it involves a concern for both present and future" [iii]

Parable of the Vineyard (Matt 21:33-46)

In this parable, the owner God plants the vineyard. He entrusted his tenants to look after it. When he sent his servants (prophets) to collect what was his due, they were killed. When his Son came, he too was killed. The Tenants had made the vineyard their own to use and abuse for their own profit.

This parable can be understood in terms of ourselves and Stewardship. God has

entrusted his earth to us; he expects us to care for it and bring forth a good harvest; and give back to him what is owed to him *"All things come from you, and of your own do we give you"* (1 Chron 29:11) If we, like the tenants in the parable, do not look after, cultivate and share the produce of the land, and give God his due, we too will come under God's judgement.

When we forget our responsibility to be wise stewards of God's earth, creation groans. The earth can no longer cope with the unrealistic demands humans impose on our natural resources (such as water, land, minerals, oil etc). Our waste and pollution are poisoning the air, soil and water. If we continue to exploit and abuse God's earth and treat it as if it is a natural, expendable resource simply for our benefit as human beings, what will be left for future generations to inherit?

Beware the 'Why Bother Disease"

When faced with major global issues (resulting from human activities) - such as changing climates and landscapes, thinning of the ozone layer, polluted land and sea, extinction of certain plants and animals - it is easy to become overwhelmed. Perhaps we are so sick and tired of hearing about the need to care for our environment; the reality of global warming, warnings about pollution etc; that we are becoming dangerously immune to the seriousness of the situation. We might throw our hands in the air and say: "Well it's not my fault. I can't do anything to prevent it. It's not my problem. Leave it to the politicians". We might think: "Who cares if I have a long shower, use plastic bags, drive my car when I could walk, enjoy eating lots of red meat, throw tin or plastic bottles out the car window or into the sea; etc…. I am only one person – what difference will it make? "

Beware of the highly contagious "why bother disease"! Apathy is the worst enemy of creation's demise.

This is a moral and spiritual issue. What I do in my daily life *does* matter – the immediate consequences of my actions might not be felt by me but will most certainly affect someone else.

How seriously we take this God-given responsibility to be wise stewards of God's creation, will be the determining factor in what kind of world we will leave behind for future generations.

Stewardship and care of the earth is much bigger than using an energy saving bulb and recycling my rubbish, as important as those things are. It embraces almost everything in our world around us. It affects access to drinkable water, making sure there is adequate sewerage and rubbish removal, land expropriation, housing needs...It also concerns fracking, industrial developments, wage negotiations, access to land and much more besides.

What positive, practical steps can you as an individual and you as a church community take to be obedient to our calling to be wise stewards and care for God's precious creation? What can you *do*? What do you need to *stop doing*?

'For evil to flourish, it simply takes good people to do nothing"

Together, we can make a difference!

Rev Canon Dr Claire Nye Hunter

Rediscovering the community of all creation

The concept of "stewardship" has weaknesses. The idea of stewardship sets humans over creation, not within it. It depicts the relationship of humans to other creatures in a purely vertical way. Stewardship does not acknowledge that we are also creatures, as we care for creation, creation also cares for us! The focus on a vertical relationship (ruler, steward) has separated us from creation. Modern western thought has denied our creatureliness, our embeddedness within creation, and our interdependence with other creatures. It can be more helpful to refer to us as part of the "the community of all creation" [iv]

THE SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION EVENT

What will geologists of the future see when they study this period in history?

Earth's ecosystems have evolved for millions of years. This process has resulted in diverse and complex biological communities, living in balance with their environment. These diverse ecosystems provide people with food, fresh water, clean air, energy, medicine and recreation. Over the past 100 years, however, nature and the services it provides to humanity have come under increasing risk.

Scientists call this new era the "Anthropocene" (Anthro means human). During the Anthropocene, our climate has changed very rapidly, oceans are acidifying, and entire biomes are disappearing – during the short period of a single human lifetime. The Earth is becoming much less hospitable for human and animal life.

Such is the magnitude of our impact on the planet that the Anthropocene is becoming known as the world's sixth mass extinction event. In the past such extinction events took place over hundreds of thousands to millions of years. What makes the Anthropocene so remarkable is that these changes are occurring within an extremely short period of time.

Over the long period of the history of the planet five mass extinctions have been identified in the rock records. How might a future geologist identify our generation in the rock records?

Scientists suggest a range of markers will be detected, from pesticides to nitrogen and phosphorus, and radioactivity . The accumulation of particulate plastics in marine sediments will be found in many of the rocks. Finally, it is likely that a future geologist will notice the rapid decline in the number of species based on clues in the fossil record: the sixth mass extinction event has already begun.

The Living Planet Report WWF[v]

GATHERING

Great Spirit God,
we give you thanks for another day on this earth.
We give you thanks for this day
to enjoy the compassionate goodness of you, our Creator.
We acknowledge with one mind
our respect and gratefulness to all the sacred cycle of life.
Bind us together in the circle of compassion
to embrace all living creatures and one another.
Amen.[vi]

Confession

Holy and merciful God, we confess that we have failed to honour you by rightly claiming our kinship with all your creatures. We have walked heavily on your earth, overused and wasted its resources, taken for granted its beauty and abundance, and treated its inhabitants unjustly, holding future generations hostage to our greed. Have mercy on us and forgive us our sin. Renew in us the resolve to keep and conserve your earth as you desire and intend, with grateful and compassionate hearts, through your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**[vii]

PROCLAMATION

Affirmation of faith

You, O God, are supreme and holy.
You create our world and give us life.
Your purpose overarches everything we do.
You have always been with us.
You are God.
You, O God, are infinitely generous,
good beyond all measure.
You came to us before we came to you.
You have revealed and proved
your love for us in Jesus Christ,
who lived and died and rose again.
You are with us now.
You are God.
You, O God, are Holy Spirit.
You empower us to be your gospel in the world.
You reconcile and heal; you overcome death.
You are our God. We worship you.[viii]

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Prayers of the People

Creator God, you have called the whole of creation into covenant with you and have called us to care for the earth and its creatures. We pray for all to whom you have given life and being, saying, **"Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace."**

For the well-being of the earth; for its resources of water, air, light, and soil, may they be tended for the good of all creatures, we pray: **Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.**

For the waters of the earth; for their careful use and conservation, that we may have the will and the ability to keep them clean and pure, we pray: **Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.**

For the mineral and energy resources of the planet, that we may learn sustainable consumption and sound care of the environment from which they come, we pray: **Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.**

For the animals of the earth, wild and domestic, large and very small, that they may be protected in the web that sustains all life, we pray: **Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.**

For all who shape public policies affecting the planet and its creatures [especially and our local leaders and], that they may consider wisely the well-being of all who come after us, we pray: **Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.**

For all those engaged in conservation, in agriculture and fishing, in mining and industry, and in forestry and timber-harvesting, that the health, fruitfulness, and beauty of the natural world may be sustained alongside human activity, we pray: **Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.**

For the creatures and the human beings of your world who are ill, or in danger, pain, or special need [especially], and for all who suffer from the unjust, violent, or wasteful use of the earth's resources that all may one day live in communities of justice and peace, we pray: **Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.**

Amen.[ix]

CELEBRATING AT GOD'S TABLE

Prayer at the preparation of the Table

As the grain once scattered in the fields
and the grapes once dispersed on the hillside
are now reunited on this table in bread and wine,
so, Lord, may your whole Church soon be gathered together
from the corners of the earth
into your kingdom. **Amen.**
Or
Blessed be God,
by whose grace creation is renewed,
by whose love heaven is opened,
by whose mercy we offer our sacrifice of praise.
Blessed be God for ever.[x]

THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

We have been guests of Jesus Christ. We have received God's good gifts. Now we go to our homes, to our neighbours, to our work equipped to put Jesus' words and being into action, to be the salt of the world, to seek justice, to make peace, to preserve creation, to gain life. **Amen.**[xi]

CREATIVE IDEAS

The altar can be decorated with fruit, vegetables and plants.
The Sunday School can prepare posters about the beauty of the Earth
A powerpoint presentation with Archbishop Tutu's Prayer for the Earth: http://www.ccow.org.uk/resources/archbishop-tutus-prayer-powerpoint/?cn-reloaded=1

Week Two: The waters of life

Jeremiah 2: 1-13	We have rejected God's living waters and turned to the idols of materialism – and so we are destroying the earth.
Psalm 107:33-38	The waters of life bring blessing and food for the hungry.
Hebrews 10: 19-25	The cleansing power of God's water.
Matthew 3: 13-17	Jesus was baptised in the Jordan river – what does it mean for us that we entered the family of God through water?

COLLECT

Lord God
In water you reveal to us the attributes of your Spirit
Deepen in us a deep respect for your waters of life
That we may more fully drink the gift of your life giving Spirit
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SERMON

A Call to Persevere

Following three years of devastating drought, Cape Town was threatened with having its taps turned off "Day Zero". What lessons can we learn from Scripture when faced by similar challenges?

Hebrews 10: 19-25

19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

As a little boy I went fishing with a friend in a little boat. The mist came down and we got lost and couldn't find our way. We called out for help "Dad, Dad". Through the mist a voice came and so we paddled as hard as we could towards him. In a few moments we broke through the midst into sunlight and it was like heaven on earth.

When it comes to issues of water, we have chosen to drift from God's ways, we have stopped being stewards of precious water and have become lost – using water as we will, dependant on anything but God. Faced with devastating drought in Cape Town, I have been asking the question – 'what does it take for a city to be in 'sackcloth''? In a city surrounded by water on all sides but facing a major drought, we are lost, calling out to God, our Father, to give us direction, to show us the way forward. And many people are afraid…

Persevere

Hebrews 10: 19-22 is a call to persevere. We do not need to panic, we do not need to despair, as Christians we are called to Persevere. Three particular aspects of this Perseverance are striking:

- v19 "we have confidence"
- v 22 "full assurance of faith"
- v23 "let us hold fast to the confession of our hope"

In times of crisis how do we - the Christian community - reveal that God is trusted? How do we hold fast? The writer to the Hebrews makes very important theological points for you and me to take hold of:

Position

We can call out to God in confidence.

23 *Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. Our confidence comes because we know the character of Jesus "By the blood of Jesus the Christ; so as a result of who Jesus is and what Jesus did we can confidently be in the presence of God who is faithful;"* (v 19-23). We are Children of the Most High, Sons and daughters of the King. Let us continue to present ourselves as hopeful for we are calling out to our loving father.

"Persevere in the position you have, and put it into practice" (Steven Cole)

If we say we have faith, we must also take action. Since we are joined with Christ each day in the body of His Church our purpose is to recommit ourselves and our families to the ways of God by the actions we take. The Church reveals our commitment by the actions of our lives. Action reveals faith.

Practice

24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Keeping this simple it seems that we are called to encourage each other into being people who express love and do good. In this particular time of crisis, the people of the city are learning that we all are interdependent and that as we all do our best to consume less water and other things too we can beat day zero. We can share ideas and encourage one other in practical ways. So in a time of drought, how should we pray?

Perseverance – to express hope in the One to who we belong;

Position - to be determined to remind one another that we are in Christ;

Practice – to show each other what it means to express love and to do good by every action we take by the power of the Holy Spirit in whom we have life.

This is living for Christ then; in a time of crisis we trust God to give us determination to express love and do good as members of our communities and so present God to those who desire direction, security, comfort and freedom. Let us persevere in the position we have, and put it into practice!

Rev Doug Kirkpatrick

Jeremiah 2: 1-13

But you came and defiled my land
and made my inheritance detestable.

v 6 - 7 In one of the most powerful environmental verses in Scripture we see the importance of water for the people of Israel. For forty years they have wandered through the barren wilderness, totally dependent for life on finding sources of water during their travels. What joy, when they finally come into a land flowing with milk and honey – a fertile land full of fruit and rich produce. And rather than caring for the land, they have defiled it and made it detestable. What have we done to God's Earth and water? Clear life-giving streams have become clogged with plastic and toxins, aquifers are polluted, the oceans are warming. These verses call upon us to lament.

And so God judges his people in verse 13:

My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

God is the spring of living water – living water flows up from the depths of the mountain and does not stop even in a time of drought. We however try to confine our spirituality in manmade tanks. In this image we compare the living streams flowing from a mountain to a manmade tank where the water becomes stagnant. And not only that – the tank is leaking! In turning from God's living waters and embracing the idols of materialism, we are destroying the Earth.

Psalm 107:33-38

The waters of life bring blessing and food
for the hungry

Psalm 107 is a psalm about the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of human beings. Time and time again we turn from him. Some were wondering in the desert and God brought them out to a safe city . Others were suffering in torments of prison and God released them from their shackles. Others went out as merchants in their ships and were caught in a great storm but God saved them. And in verse 33 we find this shocking verse "he turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into a thirsty ground, fruitful land into a salt waste" – because of the wickedness of those who live there We have turned from God, just like the merchants in the ships, we are worshipping the gods of consumerism, filling the empty space in our souls with more and more material goods. How do we understand this harsh judgement of God? We are reaping the consequences of our actions. And yet if we turn back to God he will turn the deserts again into pools of water and the parched ground into springs. What a vision of hope!

Hebrews 10: 19-25

The cleansing power of God's water

The writer of Hebrews has been explaining why the new covenant is superior to the Old Covenant- on this we base our confidence. In the Old Covenant the blood of animal sacrifice was ceremonial, it could not clean the conscience – it reminded us that our sin remained. What a beautiful image then when blood is replaced by cleansing water. Under the new covenant we are washed free of all feelings of guilt

Matthew 3: 13-17

The waters of baptism

Jesus was baptised in the Jordan river – what does it mean for us that we entered the family of God through water? We have become separated off from the sacredness of water – it comes to us from a tap or in a bottle. In the Old Testament the Old Covenant placed great emphasis on ceremonial cleanliness. Priests and other worshippers had to follow certain washing rituals in order to communicate with God (Exodus 30:18-21). Jesus, as he often did, was freed from narrow restrictions. He chose to go out into nature – to a river with all its movement and mud – to be baptised. He was cleansed by the water but also made the water sacred by his presence. What does it mean that we have taken the waters of baptism back into the church building and changed them from a roaring torrent into a few splashes of water from the tap?

Do we know where the water that we use in that tap comes from? From which river or dam does it come? And how polluted is that river with plastic or toxins? What does it mean that our river Jordan is polluted?

GATHERING

God, whose Spirit moved over the deep at its creation, and whose Son Jesus entered the waters of baptism and hallowed them forever:
We thank you for the gift of water—the waters on the surface of the earth, the waters beneath the ground, the water in our atmosphere, and the water in our bodies—and for all that dwells in the waters. Make us mindful of the care of all the planet's waters, that they may richly sustain life for us and for those who will come after us; through Jesus Christ, who is the source of living water. **Amen.**[xii]

OR

Loving Creator,
you care for the land by sending rain;
you make it fertile and fruitful.
What a rich harvest you provide!
All your creation sings for joy.
When we take care of the land,
sowing the seed and reaping the harvest,
All your creation sings for joy.
When we keep streams and rivers clean,
when we respect the purity of lakes and seas,
All your creation sings for joy.
When we recognise that we are one family,
brothers and sisters together,
with responsibility for the land and the waters,
All your creation sings for joy
for you bless us abundantly all our days.[xiii]

CONFESSION AND THANKSGIVING FOR HOLY BAPTISM

In our baptism God calls us to be Christ-like:
Let us recognise ourselves just as we are
Fallen yet re-made in his image
and let us pray for his renewing and healing Spirit

A time of silent reflection

Your spirit in baptism bring freedom
but so often our lives are weighed down by burdens we carry within us
Forgive us Lord we pray
Your Spirit in baptism brings courage
but so often our lives are ill at ease
so full of fear for what the day may bring us
Forgive us Lord we pray
Your Spirit in baptism brings wisdom
but we find it so hard to recognise your gentle whisper speaking to us
Forgive us Lord we pray
May we know the power
that breaks these chains
that bind our hearts and souls
and grace to live the life you give
Renew us Lord we pray

Water from the font is sprinkled on the people as a reminder of our baptism

Almighty God
who in Jesus Christ has given us
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed
forgive you your sins
open your eyes to God's truth
strengthen you to do God's will and
give you the joy of his kingdom
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**[xiv]

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Affirmation of Faith

We believe that God creates all things,
renews all things and celebrates all things.
We believe Earth is a sanctuary,
a sacred planet filled with God's presence,
a home for us to share with our kin.
We believe that God became flesh and blood,
became a piece of Earth,
a human being called Jesus Christ,
who lived and breathed and spoke among us,
suffered and died on a cross
for all human beings and for all creation.
We believe that the risen Jesus
is the Christ at the core of creation,
reconciling all things to God,
renewing all creation and filling the cosmos.
We believe the Holy Spirit renews life in creation
groans in empathy with a suffering creation
and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.
We believe that with Christ we will rise and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation. [xv]

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Jesus Christ teach us to empathise with Earth.
Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation,
cries for justice from the hills and the trees.
Jesus Christ make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit, groans from the deserts, the wetlands, the rivers.
Jesus Christ make our souls sensitive to the songs of our kin,
songs of celebration from the sea, the land and the air.
Christ teach us to care. **Amen.**[xvi]

CELEBRATING AT GOD'S TABLE

Prayer over the gifts

God of living water, welling up to eternal life,
Send your Spirit upon these gifts
That they may bring sustenance and renewal
to all who receive them:
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.[xvii]

THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Pilgrimage Blessing

As you go into the wilderness of the land and of your heart—
May you experience the ever-flowing grace of God's presence!
May you be immersed so fully in God's love that you learn to let go and swim!
May you engage deeply and radically with the natural world, as steward, co-creator, and friend!
May you drink anew from the divine source, the stream of living water!
And may you be transformed, may the stagnant waters of your spirit begin to flow, and may all which is dead in you rise again!
God is here. The river awaits.[xviii]

CREATIVE IDEAS

This week we remember that water is sacred, we also reflect on the lack of water justice in our society.
The altar can be decorated with bowls of water.
During the procession children can enter holding symbols of rivers and lakes, reeds, wet rocks, and pictures of frogs and whales and other sea and river creatures.
The Sunday School can lead the procession out of Church as a sign that they were the most recently baptised.

As the deer longs – Bob Hurd. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxKFtiPfxTM
Mercy as endless as the seas https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcps8EQUOt4
Prayer song "All who are thirsty and all who are weak https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrUEfAXum5Q

WATER SCARCITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Southern Africa is a water scarce region. However there are certain factors that make the situation more serious and thus very vulnerable to any chance in climate that affects rainfall.

Rainfall: On average rainfall is low, however this is made worse by geographical factors and high levels of evaporation. Only 10% of rainfall eventually ends up in rivers. In Europe 35% of rainfall ends up in rivers and in USA 45%

Urban centres: Most urban centres in Southern Africa were built for mines (eg Johannesburg, Pretoria, Windhoek, Harare). They are situated close to major watershed divides (so the water flows away from the city). This is very different from the rest of the world, where most major centres of development are located on rivers, lakes or the seashore. These centres are far from groundwater and are dependent on dams and pipelines. Water often needs to be transferred from one water 'basin' to another.

Sewage: These major centres of development are located upstream of their water storage infrastructure, or crudely put, their sewage flows naturally into their drinking and industrial process-water. We have reached the point where our developmental demands are outstripping our capacity to supply water at the necessary quality.

Industrial water pollution: Historically it is not water scarcity that has threatened major irrigation-based civilizations, but rather a salts build-up. The critical risk that needs to be managed is the build-up of salts, nutrients, heavy-metals, endocrine disruptors, carcinogens and radioactivity in rivers arising from the unregulated use of that water for industrial activities such as mining, industry and commercial farming

Unregulated mine closures: Mine closure is associated with uncontrolled flow of water from the mine void. This water is highly contaminated, with a low pH (acidic) and a high sulphate content, also containing a complex cocktail of heavy metals and radionuclides. This is known as Acid Mine Drainage.

Urbanization and Population Growth: Infrastructure investment in dams and pipes is being outstripped by demand, or is stunted as a result of insufficient investment in maintenance.

Dr Anthony Turton: the State of Water in Southern Africa.[xix]

Week Three:
The land of the Lord

Exodus 23: 10-13	The land should lie fallow to recover. We must also make provision for the poor and wild animals
Psalm 65: 1-13	The beauty of the land reveals the glory of God
James 5:4-14	God hears the cry of the farm workers who are being exploited
Matthew 20: 1-16	God cares about the needs of the worker

COLLECT

You care for land and beast and stranger
And call us to simplicity and jubilee
Open our hearts and minds to the wisdom of your ways
That the earth may be renewed
And all creation celebrate its fullness
To the glory of your name.
Amen.

SERMON

Exodus 23: 10-13

It was during the second phase of the creation story - days two to four – that God created the material framework to sustain living beings. God created the sky, (Gen. 1:6-8), followed by the sea and dry land (Gen. 1:9). Dry land would be the main arena for human life and would provide the requirements for that life, but without the life-giving rain from the sky land would be barren. It was after He had formed the dry ground that God for the first time pronounced His creation good (Gen. 1:10) . Human beings are not owners of this good land. The Bible attributes sovereignty to God alone; human beings are merely stewards who are accountable to God for the fulfilment of the responsibilities given by the Creator. Leviticus 25:23 makes it clear that all property belongs to the Lord.

"The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants" Lev 25:23.

The concept of stewardship dates back to the beginning of time when God entrusted the earth to Adam and Eve and their offspring. All resources, including land must be used for the glory of God and the common good. As stewards we have to give an account for all our actions. In Gen. 1:26-28 we have been given the essential foundation for understanding what Christian stewardship means. The stewardship expected of Adam and Eve has three essential characteristics;

It is collective; it respects the purpose for which things exist and it respects the dignity of each person and all of creation.

It is therefore incumbent upon each of us to find ways in which we can collaborate with others to make the resources in our possession work for the good of all as intended by God.

Yahweh is the one and only Lord and ultimate king over Israel, he is also Lord of the soil and its products.[xxi] If God is sovereign, he is then the only one who can bring judgment on the land; he is the only one with the right of eminent domain (Exodus 9:29). The land was the corner-stone of the covenant between God and Israel. This was proved by the fact that there were no land or property taxes in biblical law. God clearly intended that these land laws should give stability to society, thus he protected the land from any, and all, taxation.[xxii] The problem with taxation on the land is that it provides opportunities for the speculative use of land, which often upsets the stability of a community. Leviticus 25:18-22 encouraged the observance of the Sabbath law. In observing the Sabbath, the people proved that they trusted the Lord, who would not only control nature but also history, God would reward faithfulness to the Sabbath requirements. God's blessing is provisional:

…Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land (Leviticus 25:25).

The reading in Exodus 23 gives the reasons why the Sabbatical year was introduced, namely; that God had brought his people to a country of great plenty. Although it was a small country, so numerous a people could live and still spare the produce of the seventh year. Keeping the Sabbatical year taught them to have confidence in God's care and bounty while they did their duty. Just as the sixth day manna served for two days; the same applied to the sixth year's production- it should serve for two years subsistence. This would keep them in obedience and dependence upon Him and give to them and all their neighbours proof of God's gracious provision for them. If God provides then there is no need for hording. Being freed from cultivating the land and all that goes with it gave God's people time to meditate on God's work and acquaint them with his will. Lastly, the poor of the land had to eat. Because the land gave so much in the sixth year it meant at harvest time quite a lot of crop remained in the fields for the poor proving that our God is a God of both the rich and the poor, for they should all benefit from the land he has created.

James 5:4-14

The apostle James exhorts us about justice. He explains that the wealth the rich have hoarded is an injustice that has been committed. For this wrong they will be judged in court by the Lord Almighty. The poor and the land that has been abused to amass this wealth will be the one to lay the charges and the rich will be powerless before the judge, who cannot be manipulated or bribed.[xxiii] This judgment will not necessarily wait for the last day. As we speak, it has already begun. The land has been abused; chemicals have been used to enhance production, which chemicals have resulted in pollution of the earth and water bodies resulting in sicknesses and death rendering all the efforts and investments useless.

We are further exhorted as Christians to put the word into practice. Faith should express itself in concrete action. The way we live speaks louder than faith pronounced by word of mouth. As God's stewards of the land we must lead by example in the way we do our farming, mining and all other activities we engage in. Let our prophetic voice be heard condemning

all abuse that happens on the land. Putting the word into practice will require patience and endurance because we will face many temptations, tests, obstacles and challenges.

God created both the land and the seed, so we have to trust him in all our actions on the land and exercise patience and give nature a chance. A community that is faithful to the word also cares for the sick, both humans and the land. We should also involve all stakeholders in the healing of the land just like the Christians in the epistle are told to involve elders who have authority in the mattes of the church. The church is and must be a place of healing for all including the land. If we fail to heal the land where shall we get the oil for the sick?

Matthew 20:1-16

In the gospel we learn about human justice and God's justice, and the battle between our will and God's will. But when the love of God reigns in our hearts, we are brought into community with each other, (both nature and humans) and we experience the fullness of life, not as compensation but as a gift of grace.[xxiv] In the parable on labourers in the vineyard, we expect that they are going to get a pro rata share of one denarius. According to our standards that would have been fair. However, it was upon the landowner what he paid them the way he saw best. These people's problem was that they were working for the pay and not out of a sense of purpose.

But the question for us is what really motivates us to do what we do? As stewards of God's land, we will enjoy what we do when we are in the right spirit because God's justice arises out of a gracious invitation to use our innate gifts and abilities to the glory of God and the benefit of God's creation. In the long run money or recognition or praise has little to do with it. God has given each one of us gifts to work with and look after let us look after them and be thankful. That teaches us humility. In relation to God's justice we do not get what we deserve but we get what we need.

God's justice in relation to the labourers those who worked all day and those hired in the eleventh hour was manifest when they stopped seeing each other as 'us and them' and started seeing each other as 'we', that is there is no us and them as far as the land is concerned, whatever time and whenever we have the opportunity to be good stewards of the land let us do it diligently. God's justice arises out of a sense of community. The angry entitled labourers were more concerned about their rank than anything else. What is our rank in relation to the land? If indeed as Christians we are stewards of creation including the land, why have we allowed practices that have desecrated the land God created to be produce the degraded state it is in? "Our hearts and minds are corrupted by sin and we lack moral and spiritual conviction of the need to be good stewards of the land." Most of the farmers in the pews if asked what their faith in Jesus Christ means for their way of life as farmers, the answer would probably be; "I have never considered such a question before."

Finally remember, when the land mourns and becomes impoverished, people also mourn and become impoverished. Christians serve a God who has called us to bring mercy and justice to the poor through the land he has trusted us with. Keeping the land productive brings healing to all because when the land is no longer productive all suffer and cannot experience the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.[xxv] So by looking after land created by the one we follow, we demonstrate the fullness of Christ's love through a holistic approach that embraces environmental stewardship as we seek to fulfil the Great Commission.

Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya, Diocese of Swaziland

LAND JUSTICE SOUTH AFRICA

Snapshot – the Western Cape has a backlog of 575000 families on the housing data base. The province is building 18000 houses per year. There were 145 protests in the first four months of the year

- Both colonial conquest and apartheid ripped away land rights and agrarian livelihood
- The cry for land is both land for agriculture but also well-located land for urban housing
- Very little land reform has taken place in the last 24 years. One problem is there is little agreement over who should get the land
- In the 1990s it was clear that land reform was both a rural and urban priority. Since then urban land reform agenda seems to have fallen off the land reform agenda.
- Municipalities are selling well located land to the highest bidder rather than providing low cost housing
- Spatial apartheid is intact in many rural and urban areas

More than peace July 2018 [xxvii]

AGRICULTURE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Climate-soil combinations leave only 12% of the land suitable for the production of rain-fed crops. With only 3% considered truly fertile land, South Africa falls short of other countries, such as India, where arable land covers 53% of the country. Most of South Africa's land surface (69%) is suitable for grazing, and livestock farming is by far the largest agricultural sector in the country. The situation is similar in most of Southern Africa

Intensified agriculture.

Farms have generally increased their irrigation, fuel, fertiliser, mechanisation and genetically modified seed inputs. Poorly managed intensive farming has many negative impacts on the natural environment, on people's well-being and on a farmer's ability to adapt to change. A dependence and overuse of synthetic fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides reduces long-term soil fertility, causes soil erosion, pollutes water supplies, poisons fragile ecosystems, exposes farmers and farm workers to toxins, and contributes to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions.

The cumulative impact of these factors degrades farmlands and their vital catchment areas. As a result, the long-term productivity declines and these areas become more vulnerable to climate change. Intensified agriculture often also means increased mechanisation, which in turn means fewer jobs on farms. This affects the country's social well-being. The move towards genetically modified (GM) crops that depend on herbicides and fertilisers make farmers increasingly reliant on profit orientated companies. Use of genetically modified crops and certain pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers may also isolate Southern Africa from lucrative export markets. Relying on single-variety crops is also risky. If these crops fail to perform, it will have a significant impact on national production.

Climate Smart Agriculture.

Southern Africa requires a more sustainable approach, or the welfare of both current and future generations – is at risk.

Sustainable agricultural practices aim to:

- Change the way land and water resources are managed, so that their long-term productivity is optimised and sustained. Increased water use efficiency
- Contribute to the economic and social well-being of all. Reduced or predictable input costs.
- Ensure a safe and high-quality supply of agricultural products
- Safeguard the livelihood and well-being of farmers, farm workers and their families. Reduction of environmental pollution
- Maintain healthy, functioning agricultural ecosystems rich in biodiversity
- Mitigate and adapt to climate change. Carbon sequestration.

Consumers throw away more than a third of the food they have paid for and taken home.

If we can reduce food loss and wastage, we won't need to produce so much more. A lot of food is lost between the farmers' field and the dinner table – in food storage, transport, food processing, retail … and in our kitchens.

Agriculture: Facts and Trends WWF [xxvi]

GATHERING

Opening Sentence

"Let the heavens be glad and let Earth rejoice" Ps.96.11
In the name of God, who created the Earth
In the name of Jesus Christ who redeemed the Earth
And in the name of the Spirit who renews the Earth

Confession

Merciful and sustaining God, we have sinned against you. We confess our lack of gratitude for the beauty and bounty of your creation: teach us to see that your earth sustains us and all that lives. We confess that we have misused your earth: grant us amendment of life. We confess that we have been greedy and selfish: strengthen us in self-control. We confess that we have taken the abundance of your world for granted: make us urgent now for its protection. Forgive and renew us now through our Savior Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, with whom you live and reign, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.[xxviii]

PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S WORD

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, the creator of all life and beauty, who blesses our journey. We believe in Jesus Christ, who lived as a friend and savior to all he met as he traveled, and who ate and laughed, wept and celebrated with them in love. We believe in the Holy Spirit, who rides on the gentle breeze, who strengthens our bindings, and who offers hope eternal. We believe in the church, which stands open to all travelers, and bears witness to the everlasting love of God.[xxix]

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Prayers of the people

Creator God, for daily bread
and all who work
to bring your harvest home
we bring our thanks today.

Forgive our ingratitude
we who have so much
yet waste what you have given.

For those whose harvest is poor,
whose crops have withered,
water tainted, children starve,
help those who bring relief
and bestow on us
an unaccustomed generosity,
that all might share from your garden
and all might sing your praise.

Creator God, provider of all
we bring our thanks today.
And we bless each other
that the beauty of this world
and the love that created it
might be expressed though our lives
and be a blessing to others
now and always.
Amen.[xxx]

CELEBRATING AT GOD'S TABLE

Celebrant Is the Father with us?
People: He is.
Celebrant Is Christ among us?
People: He is.
Celebrant Is the Spirit here?
People: He is.
Celebrant This is our God:
People Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Celebrant We are his people:
People: We are redeemed.
Celebrant Lift up your hearts:
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God:[xxxi]

THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Leader: Christ calls you to be his disciples, to serve him with love and compassion, to serve Earth by caring for creation.
People: We will remember our planet home! We will groan with all creation! We will celebrate with Earth
Leader: Will you care for creation?
People: We will care for creation! We will nurture our planet! We will celebrate life!
Leader: May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all, fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in Earth and within you. Go in peace to serving Christ and to love the Earth!

or

Prayers of the people

The Blessing of Seed

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation: in your goodness you have given us this seed to sow.
In it we perceive the promise of life,

the wonders of your creative love.
By your blessing,
let this seed be for us a sign of your creative power,
that in sowing and watering,
tending and watching,
we may see the miracle of growth,
and in due course reap a rich harvest.
As this seed must die to give life,
reveal to us the saving power of your Son,
who died that we might live,
and plant in us the good seed of your word.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

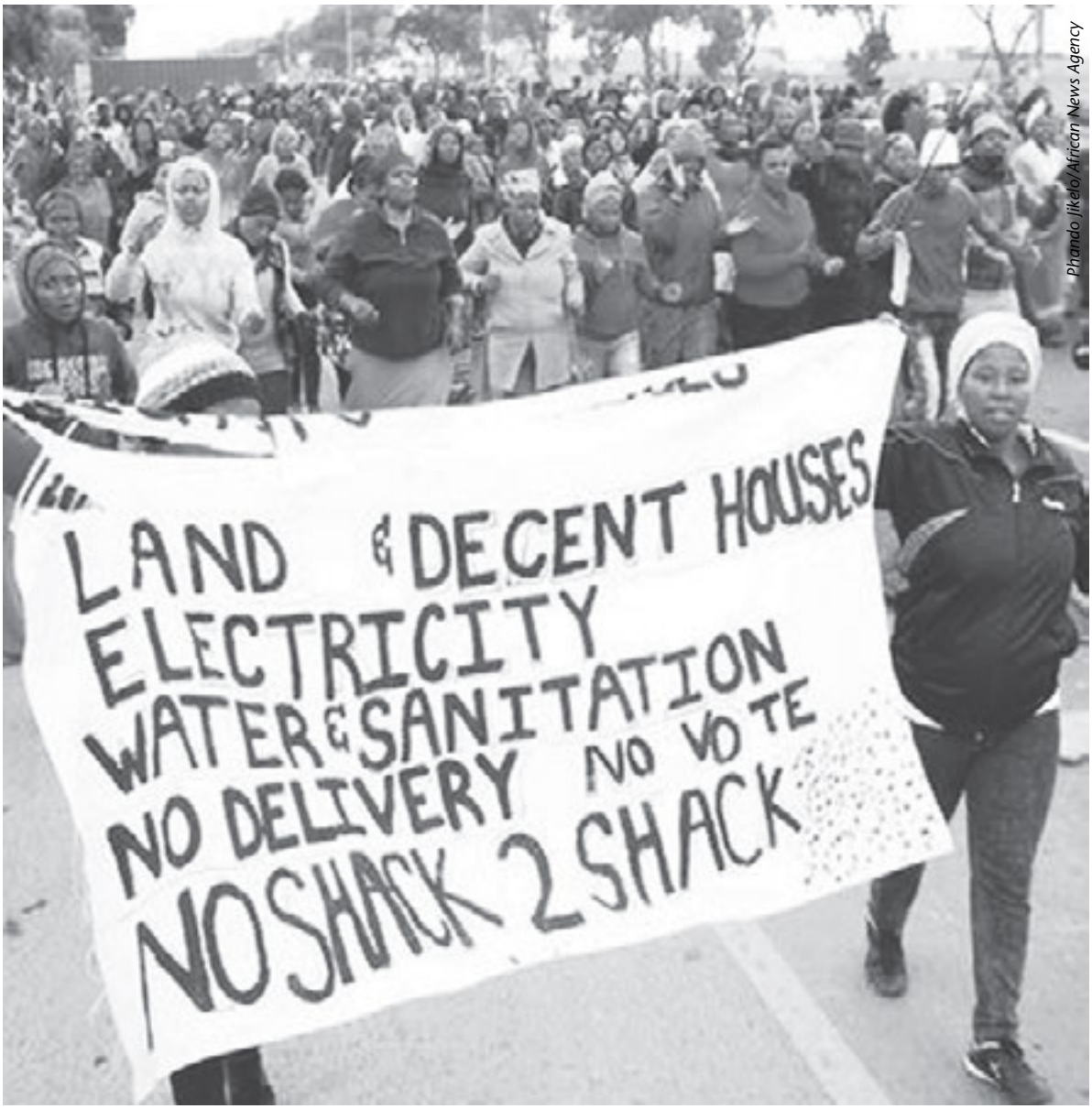
By itself the earth produces:

First the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain shall appear. [xxxiii]

CREATIVE IDEAS

We give thanks for the land that provides our food, recognising the pain of those who have lost land and mourning the destruction of land through.
Freshly baked bread could be used in the service today

The children can draw pictures of all those who work the land and the animals and plants that grow on it.
The Earth is the Lord's – powerpoint http://www.ccow.org.uk/resources/the-earth-is-the-lords/?cn-reloaded=1
Everyone is given a seed to take home as the service ends.



Phando Jikelo/African News Agency

https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/siqaloprotest-philippi-settlement-remains-on-knife-edge-14750356

Week Four: Oceans of plastic

Isaiah 24: 1-13	There are consequences to our actions – hear the cry of the Earth as a result of our waste
Psalm 74: 1-23	God is the Creator and we must protect creation from destruction
2 Corinthians 5: 14 - 17	Just as we are a new creation in Christ – we believe in a new creation and renewal of the Earth . We should be people of hope. Change is possible!
John 6: 1-15	In the feeding of the five thousand we see Jesus' principles at work: everyone is fed, there is no waste, and leftovers are given to those who need them most.

COLLECT

Lord God
You gather up the pieces so that nothing is lost
Alert us to our carelessness and wastefulness
And teach us to share from the abundance in our midst
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SERMON

Psalm 74: 1-23

There are a number of different interpretations of "waste" brought to our attention in the readings today. Our attitude to waste reveals our attitude to God and God's creation. Dealing with "waste" is something we can, and should all be involved in.

Psalm 74 must be understood following the fall and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. Verses 1 to 11 bewail the destruction of the Temple, asking *"Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?"* for *"the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary."*

Verses 12 to 17 is an acknowledgement that God is a Creator God who *"fixed all the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter."* The closing verses 18 to 23 are a plea to God, *"do not forget the life of your poor forever."* Waste is affecting the whole of Creation, and the poor are the most vulnerable.

Isaiah 24:1-13

The Isaiah lesson is equally disturbing. *"The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant."* (Isaiah 24:3-5).

How could this be, we might well ask? We need to recognise that God's temple is not just the Temple in Jerusalem. God's Temple is all of God's creation and the wonder of all life on it - in fact the Cosmos, the Universe! These words are a harsh reminder that we could bring destruction to God's "Temple" through, for example, a nuclear holocaust or the continuing burning of fossil fuels, bringing about the extinction of life as we know it on planet earth.

Both the Psalm and the Isaiah lesson are warnings of the consequences if we continue to be disobedient to God and break God's covenant with us to care for and look after God's creation.

2 Cor 5:14-17

But there is hope in the Epistle and Gospel. We hear in 2 Corinthians 5, verses 14 and 15: *"For the love of Christ urges us on……. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves….."*
We live for the good of others, and God's creation, not just selfishly for ourselves, which our present world encourages us to do, being self-centred and seeking selfish materialism, disregarding the well-being of others and other creatures' right to life.

John 6:1-15

Is not that wonderful story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand in the Gospel for today a story of sharing? A young boy who had five barley loaves and two fish was willing to share, so five thousand were fed. And nothing was wasted. *12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."* (John 6:12) NIV

So, what is all this saying to us today, in today's world?

Share, and do not waste! There is the old saying "Waste not, want not." When God fed the Israelites in the desert with bread from heaven, God told them to gather as much as each of them needed. *"Those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage. God provides for our needs, but not our greed. Moses told the Israelites "Let no one leave any of it over until morning". "But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul."* (Exodus 16:18-20).

In today's world, we are encouraged to acquire and horde. We also don't share. Forty percent of food is thrown away every day, while two billion people go hungry, because of the way we market food and the way it is controlled by multi-national corporations. God calls for equity and justice. Our present economic system encourages inequality and heightens injustice. Let us support small-time farmers and if we have any land, let us try grow our own food.

These lessons remind us of the need to follow the example and teachings of Jesus and the dangers confronting us when we turn our backs on God and do not follow God's commandments.

So what is required of us when considering waste? We have already recognised that we should not be wasteful of our God-given resources. The problem is that we humans have developed non-biodegradable products, which are non-organic. There is no waste in nature, as it is all utilised and becomes food for animals or insects or humus for plants.

However, we have developed products such as steel, cement, glass and tins which take a long time to break down. The most damaging of all is plastic which does not "break down" but "beaks up", disintegrates into minute particles that can be released into the soil, water or air, becoming poisonous to life, including us. We are now discovering that one of the greatest threats to our well-being is plastic.

A number of governments are calling for an end to single use plastic, such as we experience every time we go to a super market. Other countries, notably Rwanda and now Kenya, have banned single use plastic shopping bags, and it is transforming their countryside. Zambia, on the other hand, since South African supermarkets have moved in, is now experiencing an abundance of plastic trees – trees festooned with plastic bags blown onto them by the wind.

There is a growing campaign to bring your own bag when going shopping. That is good, but we need to go much further. We need to end our use of and reliance on plastic. We humans lived for millennia without plastic. There are a few instances where we need plastic, like insulation for electric wiring, but we can live without single use plastic.

So what is our responsibility?

For a start we all need to take greater responsibility for our own domestic waste – our rubbish. If you are fortunate enough to have a garden, make a compost bin for all your vegetable and fruit peelings. In no time you will develop good compost for a garden.

Then separate all your non-biodegradable goods - paper and cardboard, plastic, tins and bottles. Find out where they can be recycled, or pressurise your municipality to do so.

Call for the end of plastic in all packaging. Tell your shops!

Don't litter! When we throw plastic and empty bottles out of a car window it is a contemporary form of blasphemy – so much for your creation, we are saying to God!

Even on mountain tops, or isolated rocky cliffs by the sea you can find dumpy beer bottles or tins. So when you do go for a walk by the sea, or a hike up a mountain, take a black bag to collect rubbish. If you don't do it, it may be that no one else will.

The answer is that we follow the words of St Paul that we live for others, no longer just for ourselves, for *if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). We can all play a part in caring for God's world, as we discover the wonder and beauty of God's creation and become aware of the renewed creation and life around us every day.

Why does this not happen? Why are we allowing mounting quantities of rubbish and waste to threaten life on our planet? Is it not for our convenience and so-called efficiency, cutting costs and increasing profits that we do this without thinking of the consequences?

We have to consider the impact we humans make on the natural environment. In our present world economic system, we consider and make decisions on what is best for the economy. What will make the most money? We have to turn this around and make a new system, asking what is good for us and our planet on which we are totally dependent. Money is and should be only the means of doing what is best for us.

Plastic may be convenient for us and the shopkeeper, and make money, but it is devastating our planet and causing the extinction of God's creation.

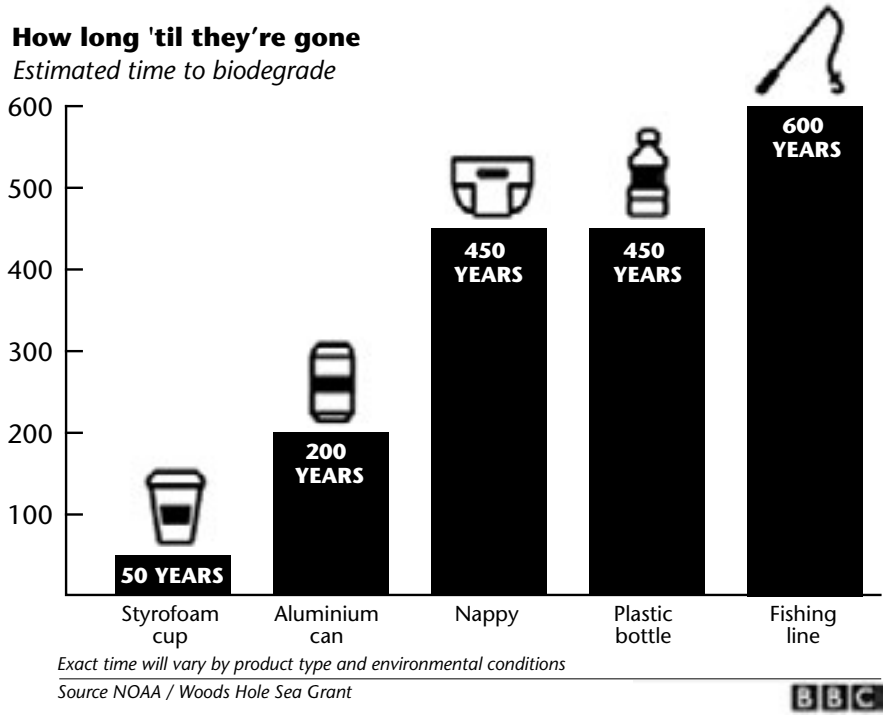
Jesus told us quite clearly *"You cannot serve God and wealth. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear"….."But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matthew 6:24, 33).

So let our parishes make shopping bags and let us go with our own bags and tell our shopkeepers that they must stop using non-biodegradable plastic. We can then refuse plastic packaging, as we learn to refuse, reduce, recycle and reuse, for our sake and God's.

Bishop Geoff Davies

MICRO PLASTICS

Plastic does not decompose, it just breaks up into ever smaller and smaller pieces. More than 300 million tons of plastic are produced each year. One million plastic bottles are produced every minute. Half of that plastic becomes trash in less than a year. South Africa uses 9 billion plastic bags per year. Out of the plastics produced, only 9% is recycled; the remaining 91% enters the air, land and water as waste. Unless we change our ways, it is forecast that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the sea than fish.
When we throw something "away" there is no such place as "away" it either ends up in landfill or in rivers and eventually the ocean. Due to sea currents, huge rotating garbage patches have been formed in the Oceans. One of them alone – the Pacific Garbage Patch is now twice the size of France,
Eventually this plastic breaks up into very tiny pieces called micro-plastics. Already microplastic is found in one out of four fish. Research shows that many of the microplastics in our bodies come from the air we breathe – not just from drinking bottled water or eating fish from polluted oceans. Due to their small size, microplastics can be inhaled and may induce a wide range of diseases including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as cancer.
And they stay in the lung tissue or enter the blood stream as the body is not able to rid itself of the tiny plastic particles. Babies who crawl on the floor are the most vulnerable, and children more generally are most at risk as their respiratory systems are still under development.
Microplastics in the indoor air result from the fragmentation through friction, heat or light of plastic objects found in our homes. These include toys, furniture, plastic bags, cosmetics, toothpaste and scrubs. Showering with a body scrub alone may flush 100,000 microplastic beads into the wastewater system and on into the air. Polystyrene does not biodegrade – it simple breaks down into small particles that are then ingested by sea creatures.



Dr Kevin Luo, Royal Institute of Technology , Sweden [xxxiv]

GATHERING

Opening Sentence

Gracious God, you reveal your goodness in the beauty and diversity of Creation, in the circle dance of earth and air and water. In a universe rich with life and community. And above all in the gift of Jesus Christ who emptied himself to serve your world. And so we offer thanks to you God in three persons, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer [xxxv]

Or

Grace to you and peace
from God our Creator,
the love at our beginning
and without end,
in our midst and with us.
God is with us,
here we find new life.[xxxvi]

Confession

God of Life
We praise you for the beauty of Creation
Its richness and variety
Yet through greed and ignorance
We choke your world with plastic waste
And throw so much way
Make us more like Jesus
Trading gently on our common home
And breathe your Spirit on us
That we may care more deeply for your Earth
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.[xxxvii]

PROCLAMATION

Creed

We believe in God, who creates all things, who embraces all things, who celebrates all things, who is present in every part of the fabric of creation.

We believe in God as the source of all life who baptizes this planet with living water.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the suffering one, the poor one, the malnourished one, the climate refugee, who loves and cares for this world and who suffers with it.

And we believe in Jesus Christ, the seed of life, who came to reconcile and renew this world and everything in it.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, who moves with God and who moves among and with us today.

We believe in everlasting life in God.

And we believe in the hope that one day God will put an end to death and all destructive forces.[xxxviii]

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Prayers of the people

Living God, we thank you for the resources of the world, and for the many goods available to us. Grant us wisdom and restraint in our spending and consumption; grant us inspiration in the re-use and recycling of resources. Bless those who collect our waste and those who work to recycle it

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**[xxxix]

Living God, where there is waste, let us bring recycling. Where there is recycling, let us bring reuse. Where there is reuse, let us bring sustainability. Where there is sustainability, let us bring justice. Where there is justice, let us bring love

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**[xi]

CELEBRATING AT GOD'S TABLE

Creation Prayer

Jesus Christ teach us to empathize with Earth. Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation, cries for justice from the land, the seas and the skies. Jesus Christ make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit in creation, groans of longing for a new creation. Jesus Christ make our hearts sensitive to the songs of our kin, songs of celebration from the sea, the forest and the air. Christ teach us to care.

Amen.[xii]

THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Eternal God,
whose Spirit moved over the face of the deep bringing forth light and life;
by that same Spirit, renew your creation, and restore your image in your people.
Turn us from careless tenants to faithful stewards,
that your threefold blessing of clean air, pure water and rich earth
may be the inheritance of everything that has the breath of life
and one generation may proclaim to another the wonder of your works;
through Jesus Christ, your living Word,
in whom the fullness of your glory is revealed.
Amen.[xli]

CREATIVE IDEAS

Waste can be placed at the door of the church as people come in.
The youth and Sunday School can make posters about waste
Hold a clean-up of the churchyard and the street outside after the service.
Make commitments as a church to reduce "one use" plastic as much as possible.
Here are some materials for Sunday School: http://www.greenanglicans.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Oceans-of-Plastic.pdf

Week Five: The song of all creation

Numbers 22: 22-35	God speaks through a donkey
Psalm 104: 1-30	God provides food for all animals even those that are far away from humans
Colossians 1: 15-23	All things were created through Christ and all things (not just humans) are saved through Christ
Luke 6: 43-49	Good trees will bear good fruit. Nature can teach us about our spirituality.

COLLECT

Lord God
Your eternal power is seen in the whole web of life
Your voice is heard in the beauty of creation.
Rooted in your love may we worship you with all your creatures
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SERMON

Psalm 104: Celebrating Diversity

"The one thing that connects modern man with his prescientific ancestors, is a sense of awe at the wonders of the celestial heaven" writes Brian Swimme, a mathematical cosmologist. This sense of awe and wonder is articulated by the author of Psalm 104 through his observations of the natural world surrounding him and expressed in a hymn of praise to the creator. The imagery is wonderful and is full of the weather, mountains, water systems and plant and animal life that the psalmist was familiar with. The psalmist is awed by the interconnectedness of different biospheres. Springs create streams that give water to beasts of the field where wild donkeys quench their thirst and birds nest in the trees. Cattle are sustained by the grass and crops. Wine, oil and bread provide human beings with the sustenance they need. All of this comes wonderfully in due season. The cedars of Lebanon are named, the storks are mentioned as are the wild goats and the coneys (hyrax or 'dassies"). The sea is acknowledged for the life which teems within it and the mythical leviathan (sea monster) frolics in the ocean.

All of the psalmist's observations are linked to his understanding of God. Everything to do with the heavens is seen as a royal raiment giving God splendour, rank and majesty. God's omnipotence is seen in the stability of the earth on its foundations and the boundaries between water and earth set in place by God's authority. God as sustainer is evident in the springs and the water that provide for plant and animal life both domestic and wild and for humankind as well.

The psalmist cries out: "How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all …" (Ps 104:24)

How essential is this awe and wonder to our own wellbeing and to a commitment to the well being of the planet? Certainly some of the most fervent activists of our history and day are those who have found deep commitment and inspiration in the beauty and creation around them.

Thomas Berry is probably one of the most influential eco philosophers and an activist for the creation of a new attitude in which human beings and nature exist in a mutually enhancing roles. He writes of his own simple but telling experience in his book 'The Great Work'. As a young boy he experienced a meadow in a spring afternoon in all its beauty, this left such an impression on him that it became the yardstick by which he measured all his ecological thinking: *"Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformations is good; whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple."*[xliii]

Can we reflect on an incident or experience in our own lives that provide us with such a testimony and is transformative of our own attitude toward the planet and its creatures?

Another personality, Brother Lawrence in the 17th century, found his own faith and spiritual discipline after contemplating a tree in the middle of winter. Realizing that in the spring and summer the tree would regain is leaves, and that flowers and fruit would emerge, he realised that God would provide for him too in due season. This realization was for him the basis of his spirituality, namely, to continually practice the presence of God. Despite being well read and educated Brother Lawrence worked his whole life in a kitchen.

The mystery of creation provides many a parable for our understanding of God. The fact that God is the Provider is deeply ingrained in the integrity of creation and we make a huge mistake when we no longer allow providence to determine the pace of existence and allow our consumer lifestyles to determine the human and planetary trajectory. When we take God out of the picture, the fact that we are consume planetary resources at rate far in excess of the planets ability to replenish itself should not surprise us.

Francis of Assisi, to whom the church has given the status of patron saint of animals, lived a faith deeply instilled with a similar sense of the gift of creation. In the Canticle of the Sun, Francis speaks respectfully and with deep humility of the celestial and natural world as brothers and sisters. Sun, moon, water, fire, earth are all fellow creatures who reflect the wonder of the creator:

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,

especially through my lord Brother Sun,

who brings the day; and you give light through him.

And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!

Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

(Canticle to the Sun)

Recovering a sense of awe and wonder should be a primary spiritual endeavour. Science

should in no way negate the sense of awe we feel but rather through observation detail it's wonder. Without a connection with nature and its diversity we remain separated from any motivation to care for the planet. Larry Rassmusen in his book Earth Community Earth Ethics comments that we live with a spiritual apartheid separating us from the natural world. In the racist language of the South African apartheid era the white governing minority referred to black people as non-whites. The ethnocentric (race centred) and dehumanising effect of this is not dissimilar to the anthropocentric (human centred) way we speak of nature as non-human. Instead of articulating what the other is we simply see it as that which is not us. Larry Rassmusen writes:

"we do not live with "nature," then. We live with trees, animals, birds, and insects of nearly infinite variety; with winds, clouds, and the spirited gases of the atmosphere, with mountains, lakes, streams, oceans, beaches, forests grasslands, and deserts; with bacteria and amoebae and viruses; with the sun, moon, and fifty million galaxies.[xliv]

This diversity and variety and its connectedness and providence is the source of the joy and wonder of the psalmist. In it he recognizes the work of God. (104:31)

Conversely, it seems separation from nature, can and does play a profoundly negative role, not only in our attitude to caring for nature but also in creating behavioural problems and dysfunctionalities within our own psyche and behaviour.

Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD)[xliv] is a term used to describe the condition of children who spend little or no time interacting with nature. These are children who spend significant amounts of their day before electronic devices. Interaction with nature is vital for spiritual wellbeing of the individual and especially in child development.

A primary role of the church, in the midst of a time when the human contribution in the degradation of the planet has become so obvious, should be to assist its members to experience anew the wonders of the natural world and to articulate its diversity and connectedness. This is both a pastoral and spiritual responsibility. Out of a sense of celebration and closeness to earth new motivations can arise to care for the planet. When this happens, we find within ourselves, individually and communally, a deep sense of celebration and devotion. Surely to rediscover the primary mission of caring for creation is a fundamental task of the church. Who knows how these moments of wonder and awe can affect our behaviour and sense of responsibility toward the care of the planet.

There are projects which are prophetic and interventionist in correcting earth injustices and there are those in which our relationship with the earth and its diversity of life is healing and life giving. Through liturgies, outings, hikes, retreats, planting gardens and, community projects the church is the articulating voice of the psalmist proclaiming the wonder of creation as an expression of the majesty and magnificence of God.

Numbers 22: 22-35

In this fascinating story of the relationship of Balaam and donkey. We see that the donkey is more spiritually attuned to seeing the angel than Balaam. We also see the cruelty of Balaam towards the donkey as he beats him. The Bible recognises the relationship between humans and domestic animals. Our responsibility is to be caring responsibility. This relationship has totally broken down in the modern systems of systemized brutality and exploitation that have replaced the farmers' caring relationship with an industrialised system. We love and protect our pets and yet allow pigs or chickens to be raised in conditions of great cruelty

Colossians 1: 15-23

In this wonderful "hymn" of creation there are two themes – the creation of all things (15-17) and the reconciliation of all things (18-20). "all things "is mentioned 6 times in this passage. Not only did God create all things – he also reconciled all things. We often have no problem in recognising that God is the creator of all, but we tend to believe that Jesus died on the cross only to save human beings. This is to limit the work of Jesus who reconciled "all things" through his blood on the cross.

Luke 6: 43 – 49

Jesus used the visual images that surrounded him to teach in parables. He used the image of a fruit bearing tree to help people to understand that your spiritual life must be planted in rich soil, composted and watered in order to give fruit. What a simple and yet inspiring message. To grow good fruit, a tree must also be pruned from time to time. Are we willing to let God prune us?

Rev. Tim Gray

GATHERING

Opening Sentence

Blessed be God: Creator, Word, and Spirit, who brings all things into being and calls them good.
Bless your Creator, all animals of the land.
Let us praise and exalt our Creator together.
Bless your Creator, all birds of the air.
Let us praise and exalt our Creator together.
Bless your Creator, all creatures of the sea.
Let us praise and exalt our Creator together.
Bless your Creator, all children of God.
Let us praise and exalt our Creator together.
The Lord be with you.
And also with you.[xlvii]

Confession

God of Life
We praise you for the beauty of Creation
Its richness and variety
Yet through greed and ignorance
We choke your world with plastic waste
And throw so much way
Make us more like Jesus
Trading gently on our common home
And breathe your Spirit on us
That we may care more deeply for your Earth
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.[xlviii]

PROCLAMATION

The Affirmation of faith

You, O God, are supreme and holy.
You create our world and give us life.
Your purpose overarches everything we do.
You have always been with us.
You are God.
You, O God, are infinitely generous,
good beyond all measure.
You came to us before we came to you.
You have revealed and proved
your love for us in Jesus Christ,
who lived and died and rose again.
You are with us now.
You are God.
You, O God, are Holy Spirit.
You empower us to be your gospel in the world.
You reconcile and heal; you overcome death.

You are our God. We worship you.[xlix]

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Prayers of the people

Creator of earth, sea, and sky, kindle the fire of your Spirit within us that we may be bold to heal and defend the earth, and pour your blessing upon all who work for the good of the planet. **God, Giver of life, Hear our prayer.**

Breath of life, receive our thanks for the beauty of the Earth and all who dwell in it, and grant us the wisdom and will to conserve it. **God, giver of life, hear our prayer**

Source of life, heal and redeem the wounds of your creation, and visit the places and people who suffer from our indifference, neglect, and greed.
God, Giver of life, Hear our prayer.

Lover of all you have made, we thank you for the wondrous diversity of your creatures, and we pray for their wellbeing.
God, **Giver of life, Hear our prayer.**

Author of the book of nature, receive our gratitude for places of restoration and healing, and continue to bless those places that feed our lives and spirits.
God, Giver of life, Hear our prayer.

Giver of all good gifts awaken us daily to our dependence upon your bounty and make us always thankful for the abundance of your blessings.
God, Giver of life, Hear our prayer.

Divine Physician heal our communities, especially those where neglect, greed, or violence inflict suffering upon people and other creatures.
God, Giver of life, Hear our prayer.

Eternal God, the light of all who know you, come and fill our hearts with your love. Help us speak when many keep silent, help us stand for what is right when many sit in indifference. Increase our faith and charity, until your kingdom comes, and heaven and earth rejoice in everlasting glory; through your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.[l]

CELEBRATING AT GOD'S TABLE

Behold the Saviour who will not save himself;
Behold the Creator, whom the world disowns.
His cross is the reconciliation;
Christ is peace between God and the world,
peace between the world and God.[li]

THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Christ calls you to be his disciples,
to serve him with love and compassion,

to serve Earth by caring for her creatures. Will you care for creation?

We will care for creation!
We will nurture our animals!
We will celebrate the circle of life with them!

May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all,
fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in Earth and the pulsing of Christ within you.
Go in peace, to serve Christ and love all creatures![lii]

BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

The animals are blessed individually by name by the Priest, using these or other words
Fellow creature, friend and companion:
May God your creator and preserver bless, defend, heal, and keep you, this day and always. Amen.

The Presider then invites the People to name aloud their animals at home and to pray together, using these words All
Fellow creatures, friends and companions:
May God your creator and preserver bless, defend, heal, and keep you, this day and always.
Amen.

CREATIVE IDEAS

Today we celebrate the beauty of creation
Here are some powerpoints on Biodiversity
http://www.ccow.org.uk/resources/god-saw-good/?cn-reloaded=1
(particularly "biodiversity in scripture"
here is St Francis' Canticle of All Creation :
http://www.ccow.org.uk/resources/laudato-si-canticle-of-the-creatures-powerpoint/?cn-reloaded=1
The Sunday School can surround the altar with pictures of God's creation
The youth could do a drama based on the life of St Francis (what his life might be like in modern times)

BIODIVERSITY IS UNDER THREAT

Over the last 50 years species the population of wildlife populations have shrunk by 67%. Landbased animals have fallen by 38% and freshwater creatures by 81%.

The most common threat is degradation of habitat. We would need 1.6 planets to sustain our current consumption.
We need to regain an understanding of the links between humans and nature.
If nature flourishes, then humans can flourish. We depend on nature for the air we breathe, water we drink, the food and materials we use and the economy we rely on, and not least, for our health, inspiration and happiness.
We need to transition to an approach that decouples human and economic development from environmental degradation—perhaps the deepest cultural and behavioural shifts ever experienced by any civilization.

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Green Anglicans
Anglican Church of
Southern Africa
Environmental Network
www.greenanglicans.org

SEASON OF
CREATION
www.seasonofcreation.org

"Creation is standing on tiptoe waiting for the children of God to be revealed" Rom 8:19

The climate crisis is one of the primary indicators that we are living in a time of great change, great conflict, and great confusion. There is no consensus on the moral principles that should ground our society. Factions define progress by conflicting standards -- economic growth for corporations and the wealthy, individualistic freedom to act and believe in almost any way, technological advances, or health for communities both human and ecological.

Not only does the climate crisis create an opportunity for the church to be fully and faithfully engaged in mission, it is also an opportunity for the church to rediscover and reclaim our purpose. If the Christian church does not claim this opportunity, then we'll be unable to inspire humanity to engage a new moral era.

There is an opportunity for theological renewal. If we take seriously what science tells us, we can come to new wonder and commitment about the intricate creation in which we live and which is held in love by God. As we re-read our sacred texts and examine our traditions, we can rediscover that the promise of faith is for communities as well as individuals. As we recognize the urgency of these times, we'll see that faithfulness is about action as well as belief.

There is an opportunity for renewal in preaching and worship. When our worship springs from compassion for a global and intergenerational community, we're drawn out of self-centered and domesticated rituals. Worship and prayer may be taken to the streets and the parliament, as well as the church building. Preaching that speaks to this time of crisis will be both pastoral and prophetic.

There is an opportunity for discipleship and witness. Theology and ethics will draw us into service of those who face injustice and suffering in this climate-distorted world. We will speak, not only within our church communities, but in the broader society about the standards for justice, for the expansive range of neighbor love, about hope and the possibility of transformation. We'll be called to speak good news that is equal to the scale of this crisis.

There is an opportunity for community and collaboration. In a time of division and partisanship, honest and confessional conversation can bridge disagreement and rebuild trust. When we join forces with scientists and activists and community leaders, we'll find energy and effectiveness in new coalitions.

"Climate change is an opportunity for which the church was born." Claiming this opportunity will revitalize the church in its mission and ministry. That's good for the church, and it is a gift to the world.

– Rev Peter Sawtell: Executive Director,
Eco-Justice Ministries

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