

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 12th February 2023 – The Second Sunday before Lent

The service can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley Benefice for Sunday 12th February which has been put together by Liz Howlett. We worship together across the valley in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This week's theme is Creation, and we begin our worship with the opening verses of Genesis chapter 1:

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.'

Hymn: Thou whose almighty word

1 Thou whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight;
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the Gospel-day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light.

2 Thou, who didst come to bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
O now to all mankind
let there be light.

3 Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight;
move o'er the water's face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light.

4 Blessed and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might;
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world far and wide
let there be light.

John Marriott (1780-1825), Thomas Raffles (1788-1863) (Public Domain)

More from Genesis:

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

Prayer of Confession and Absolution

In the beauty of the earth, in the silence of our hearts, in the community of your church, in all acts of grace and kindness, in forgiving from the heart and in worship from the soul, your Spirit confirms the truth in which we seek to live.

If knowing this, we have failed to love you, our Maker, been hesitant to follow your Son, and suspected the power of your Spirit, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

If we have desired comfort more than devotion and if we have satisfied our wants more than we have served your will, Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

If we have limited our company to those like us and if we have restricted our conversation to matters of no consequence, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God, give us reverence for all creation and respect for every person, that we may mirror your likeness in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The First Reading continues: Genesis 1: 20 – 2: 3

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6: 25 – end

Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Reflection

There is one Sunday in the church's year when all the readings have some focus on the created world – and it happens to be today! Firstly, I hope you have enjoyed the Genesis creation reading this morning. It is a wonderful, poetic piece of writing which puts God and goodness at the very beginning and at the very heart of everything that is – in us, in our natural world and in the whole universe. I wonder what you are noticing in the natural world at the moment, as the days lengthen and signs of spring begin to appear...

At Othona, the thrush has returned to sing once again – I hear him at dawn and at dusk; the broad beans seem to have survived the harsh frosts in the vegetable garden; our lovely volunteer gardeners have started back for their weekly morning in our polytunnel and veg beds and preparations are underway for a new growing season, weeding round the fruit bushes and planting onions. As I write (and record) this, I am looking directly out over our small vegetable garden, with an apple orchard just beyond. As it says towards the end of the Genesis reading, 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.'

The people who put the Hebrew scriptures together, the Old Testament as we know them, felt this was the really

important message that needed to come at the very beginning of the first book. We do not need to feel we must believe in a literal seven day creation – this passage is saying something much more significant than that, I would suggest – about the intimate connection between God and creation and how that everything which came into being was very good. We know that the Genesis writer was keenly aware that in his world, as in ours, all was not well – they would have been aware of wars, disease, hunger, devastating earthquakes – a sadly familiar story – the writer wasn't pretending about their world – we know that because they go on to tell the tale of Adam and Eve and how they had to leave Eden. Again we need not worry whether Adam and Eve were actual people – their story is more of a tale that tries to answer the question – 'why are things as they are, why is there violence, why do people hurt each other?' But the very beginning of Genesis is not about that, it is about 'God and goodness' being at the heart of things. This means, I believe, that it is worth our while working and praying for a better world, for God's kingdom to come. If Genesis began by saying that humans were created evil and the world was created fatally flawed from the start, without hope of healing, and all we could ever hope for was more of the same, then that would be a very different situation for us.

In our gospel passage, we are with Jesus and we can imagine him and his listeners, in the open air, with birds singing and flying about overhead – and under foot, the lilies flourishing in the fields. Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God, God's reign, in a positive way, as very definitely something worth working and praying for. And alongside this, he is encouraging his listeners to let go of their worry. I wonder if you are a worrier. There are certainly some nights when worry has kept me from sleeping and I know there are some things I haven't done as well as I could have, because the anxiety I've felt has held me back. Sometimes in those situations I find that focussing on things outside of me can be helpful, rather than turning the same thoughts over and over in my head. Jesus wants his hearers to know that there is something bigger than them and that it is all about God and goodness. Perhaps we can imagine Jesus saying, 'What's really really important? God's reign of love, compassion, truth, and justice is really really important and it is worth giving our energy and our prayer to. Try not to be consumed by worry about yourself – God knows what we need'. Let's be encouraged ourselves to think and live bigger, for our own good and for the good of other human beings and the planet.

The Genesis passage reminds us that we humans are creatures, just as much as the birds of the air, the broad beans and the lilies of the field. In less than a fortnight, we will hear these words said to us on Ash Wednesday, 'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' I wonder how you respond to those words. Are they morbid for you, or a realistic assessment of our place in the scheme of things? One thing that strikes me about them – they are a great leveller. Before she retired, my mum was an Occupational Therapy Aide in the Geriatric Hospital in Taunton. She would organise activities and games for the patients and she would also join them at their monthly service of Holy Communion. I remember a really insightful comment she made about the service there, that communion brought everyone, whether the givers, such as nurses and OTs, or the receivers, such as patients, to the same level – all became receivers – all were on the receiving end of God's grace. I think the same is true of those Ash Wednesday words that remind us that we are all earthy creatures, 'we are made of dust and we shall return to dust', whether we wear a crown, drive a swish car or rely on public transport. We are all earthy and we are all glorious because of it! And in some extraordinary way, we earth creatures, for the short time we have on this earth, can join in with what God is doing in the world, through our prayers and actions, to help bring in God's kingdom among us. Amen

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded

1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

3 God's great goodness ay endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,

beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore, from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

4 Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from man to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Let us pray: May it not be long, Lord...

May it not be long, Lord, before the world we pray for and the world we inhabit are one.

May it not be long before the earth no longer suffers through human selfishness, so that the valleys can sing again, the meadows laugh and barren places burst into bloom. **May it not be long.**

May it not be long, Lord, before the domination of wealth over want, male over female, white over black, the privileged over the poor, be facts of history, not facts of life. **May it not be long.**

May it not be long, Lord, before spears are turned into pruning forks and all the peoples of the world are able to live in peace and harmony with one another. **May it not be long.**

May it not be long, Lord, before we vacate the places of fear and anxiety and find wells of hope and peace, deeper than shallow pools of optimism. **May it not be long.**

The Lord's Prayer

And as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, On earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory For ever and ever. Amen

Blessing

'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.'

And so may God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all goodness and growth, pour his blessing upon all created things and upon you, that you may use his gifts to his glory and the welfare of all peoples and creation; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you now and always. **Amen.**

Hymn: Beauty for brokenness

1 Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!

2 Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
work for the craftsmen, trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak:

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray;
melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;
come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

3 Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

4 Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned -our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
make us content with the things that we need.

God of the poor ...

5 Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
until your justice burns brightly again;
until the nations learn of your ways,
seek your salvation and bring you their praise.

God of the poor ...

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