

Service of Prayer and Readings for the Season of Creation 2022:

'Listen to the Voice of Creation'

Welcome:

Welcome to this service of readings, prayer, and reflection. It is our second ecumenical service and marks the end of this year's Season of Creation. At the start of the Season, Pope Francis asked that, 'we return to pray in the great cathedral of creation, enjoying the "grand cosmic choir" of innumerable creatures singing the praises of God'.

During the service, therefore, we will be reflecting on how we are harming the planet by our, at times, uncaring attitude to nature and Earth's resources, and praying that we act more responsibly. These concerns, however, are nothing new; writing to a fellow abbot, St. Bernard of Clairvaux urged him not to ignore the natural environment, saying:

'for those who have experience will find much more labouring amongst the woods than you ever will amongst books. Woods and stones will teach you what you can never hear from any masters'.

This regard for nature is also echoed by St. Francis who, for example, forbade the brothers cutting down a whole tree when they cut wood so it might have the hope of growing again. He also commanded the gardener at his monastery to leave the border around the garden undug so that 'in their proper times the greenness of the grass and the beauty of the flowers might 'announce the beauty of the Father of all things.'

Hildegard of Bingen, the 13th century theologian and mystic, sounds a more salutary note in some of her writings. Much of what she wrote, and the music she composed, was a celebration of the beauty of God's Creation. She emphasised the harmony of Creation, the intimate connection between the natural world and human beings; the interconnectedness of all creatures. She was prophetic in her description of the ecological devastation that would result from our abuse of the Earth. She warned that, 'in the people that were meant to be green there will be no more life of any kind, only shrivelled bareness.' She goes on to say:

Glance at the sun. See the moon and stars.
Gaze at the beauty of Earth's greenings.
Now think what delight God gives to humankind.
But we are to work with it.
For without it we cannot survive.

These prophetic words by the saints foretold what scientists are telling us today: that we must work with the earth and act now if we are to preserve our world for future generations.

Please stand.

Hymn (898)

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord.
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, only light,
Where there is sadness, ever joy.

O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and it's in dying that we're born to
eternal life.

Penitential Prayer:

Holy God, earth and air and water are your creation,
and every living thing belongs to you:

have mercy on us as climate change confronts us.
Give us the will and the courage to simplify the way we live,
to reduce the energy we use,
and to share the resources you provide.
Forgive our past mistakes
and send us your Holy Spirit,
with wisdom in present controversies,
and vision for the future to which you call us.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

A Reading from the Book of Genesis (8.22; 9.8–10)

The Lord God said, 'As long as the earth lasts, sowing and reaping, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall cease no more.' Then God spoke to Noah and his sons, 'See, I establish my Covenant with you; also, with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on the earth.

Reflection

The earth's resources are being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. This is in spite of our interconnectedness with nature. We are all God's creation, but by our actions we are destroying the natural environment.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasises this when he says:

'Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last 200 years. Each year sees the disappearance of hundreds of plants and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?'

Pause for reflection

Psalm 18 (1-9) – Praise of God the Creator

The heavens proclaim the glory of God,
And the firmament shows forth the work of his hands.
Day unto day takes up the story,
And night unto night makes know the message.

No speech, no word, no voice is heard,
Yet their span goes forth through all the earth,
Their words to the utmost bounds of the world.
There he has placed a tent for the sun;
It comes forth like a bridegroom coming from the tent,
Rejoices like a champion to run its course.

At the end of the sky is the rising sun;
To the furthest end of the sky is its course.
There is nothing concealed from its burning heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect,
It revives the soul.
The rule of the Lord is to be trusted,
It gives wisdom to the simple.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be world without end.

Amen

Why I wake Early (Mary Oliver)

Hello, sun in my face.
Hello, you who made the morning
and spread it over the fields
and into the faces of the tulips

and the nodding morning glories,
and into the windows of, even, the
miserable and the crotchety –
best preacher that ever was,
dear star, that just happens
to be where you are in the universe
to keep us from ever-darkness,
to ease us with warm touching,
to hold us in the great hands of light –
good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day
in happiness, in kindness.

Pause for reflection

Reading from the Prophet Jeremiah 4: 23-28

I looked to the earth, to see a formless waste; to the heavens, and their light had gone. I looked to the mountains, to see them quaking and all the heights astir. I looked, to see no man at all, the very birds of heaven had fled. I looked, to see the wooded country a wilderness, all its towns in ruins, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of his burning anger. Yes, thus speaks the Lord, 'The whole land shall be laid waste, I will make an end of it once for all; at which the earth will go into mourning, and the heavens above grow dark. For I have spoken and will not change my mind, I have decided and will not go back on it.

Reflection

In this reading, Jeremiah makes clear that all of creation is caught up in the failure of humanity to act according to God's plan. It appears to be a cry of hopelessness and pain; however, this desolation and pain are not the final word. Jeremiah is compelled to write as he does, not because he is without hope, but because of the covenants that God has made with his creation. Our

hope will be realised when we are no longer apart from God, but find ourselves reunited with him.

Poem: Invitation (Mary Oliver)

Oh, do you have time to linger
for just a little while out of your busy
and very important day for the goldfinches
that have gathered in a field of thistles
for a musical battle, to see who can sing
the highest note, or the lowest,
or the most expressive of mirth,
or the most tender?
Their strong, blunt beaks drink the air
as they strive melodiously
not for your sake and not for mine
and not for the sake of winning
but for sheer delight and gratitude –
believe us, they say, it is a serious thing
just to be alive on this fresh morning
in the broken world. I beg of you,
do not walk by without pausing
to attend to this rather ridiculous performance.
It could mean something. It could mean everything.
It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote:
You must change your life.

Pause for reflection

Psalm to the Voice of Creation (Eric Williams)

Lord, You alone can guide us, teach us the way we must go.
The earth is holy. The Universe is One. All Your creatures are kin.
We all move towards You, our common point of arrival.
As we journey together, help us to respect the needs of all Your creatures.
Help us to connect with our neighbours, with all our sisters and brothers

and care for the world we leave for the generations who follow us.
Inspire us to see Your footprints, hear Your voice in the beauty of Your creation.

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord
How great Thou art!
Sing my soul, my saviour God, to Thee

Your creation is clear and precious and beautiful.
You made the sea and shaped the dry land.
The depths of the earth are in Your hand.
The heights of the mountains are Yours.
Every living thing speaks of Your love,
Tells of Your boundless affection for us.
The world is charged with the glory of Your Mystery,
The blaze of Your eternal Presence that never burns up,
The flaring Presence of the Holy Spirit, sustained and sustaining.

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord
How great Thou art!
Sing my soul, my saviour God, to Thee

The wild fires of our injustice burn up, consume us:
Forests crackle, animals flee, rivers run dry.
Your creatures cry out as they suffer destruction,
Devastation and disintegration.
Disaster and disconnection.
We stand before You, Holy Spirit, gathered in Your Holy Name.
We cannot understand Your Mystery, cover our mouths like Job.
We have strayed from the way of truth and what is right.
We are silenced in the radiance of Your light.

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord
How great Thou art!
Sing my soul, my saviour God, to Thee

Let us find in You our unity and journey together to eternal life.

The trees give off hints of gladness. The light flows from their branches.

Let us be filled with Your light and shine.

The trees stir in their leaves and call out “Stay awhile”.

May we go easy, slow down, breathe deeply.

Open our eyes to the beauty of Your gift, right here,

The whole world You have loaned us to tend with care.

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord

How great Thou art!

Sing my soul, my saviour God, to Thee

(assembled from text of first Service)

Pause for reflection

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Repentance

Lord, we thank you for the miraculous gift of creation. We thank you for the changing seasons; for the colour and scent of flowers and herbs, of grass and trees; we thank you for sun and rain, which ensure the never-failing fruitfulness of the earth. Make us more conscious of our responsibility to respect and care for your creation.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We confess that the way we live today is changing the climate, the seas, and the balance of life, dispossessing the poor and future generations. Help us to be good neighbours and to recognise that our relationships are broken, and the planet’s ecosystems are fractured.

Lord, in your mercy...

We give thanks for world that we share with the whole community of life. Transform our hearts and minds that we may learn to care and share, to walk lightly on the earth with gentleness and love.

Lord, in your mercy ...

We see that the whole of creation is struggling with changing conditions and our own communities are fragmented by inequality and division. Help us to recognise that our lifestyles already threaten those living on the periphery, the

livelihood of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens of the world. We pray that we may recognise our responsibility to seek justice so that all peoples may live in justice and peace.

Lord in your mercy ...

Our Father ...

Canticle of the Creatures (Francis of Assisi)

Reading this poem could form part of our daily meditation, in which we deliberately call to mind elements of the natural world that we can easily take for granted: the air, on which we depend for every second of our lives; the humility of water; or the playful vigour of fire. Finally, it reminds us of our own mortality, which we share with all nature.

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours is the praise, the glory and the honour and every blessing.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
And no one is worthy to speak your name.

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom you bring us light.
And he is lovely, shining with great splendour,
For he heralds you Most High.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars.
In heaven you formed them,
lightsome and precious and fair.

And praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
through air and cloud, through calm
and every kind of weather by which
you sustain your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
so very useful and humble, precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
by whom you light up the night,
and he is handsome and merry, robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth,
who sustains us and directs us bringing forth
all kinds of fruits and coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be you, my Lord through those who forgive for your love
and who bear sickness and trial.
Blessed are those who endure in peace, for by you,
Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death
from whom no living being can escape.
How dreadful for those who die in mortal sin!
How blessed are those she finds in your holy will
for the second death can do them no harm.
O praise and bless my Lord,
thank him and serve him humbly but grandly!

Final Reflection (*Let Us Dream*, Pope Francis):

We can begin to implement an ecological conversion at every level of society in the ways that I suggested in *Laudato Si*:

moving to renewable energy and away from fossil fuels; respecting and implementing biodiversity; guaranteeing access to clean water; adopting a more restrained lifestyle; changing our understanding of value, progress, and success by taking into account the impact of our businesses on the environment.

Let us use the years ahead to practice an *integral* ecology, allowing the principle of ecological regeneration to shape the decisions we take at every level... The goods and resources of the earth are meant for all. Fresh air, clean water, and a balanced diet are vital for health and well-being of all peoples. Let us put the regeneration of the earth and universal access to its goods at the heart of our post-Covid future.

Pause for Reflection

Recessional Hymn

All creatures of our God and king,
Lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam:

*O praise him. O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.*

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia!

Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice:

*O praise him. O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That givest us both warmth and light:

*O praise him. O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One.
O praise him. O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia