

Stations of Creation

For some years Christians have been celebrating the Season of Creation, which starts on the 1st September and ends on the Feast of St Francis on 4th October. It is an ecumenical celebration of prayer and action for the common home and a time when we can come together to celebrate everything that is in God's Creation.

Each year there is a different theme for the Season, and this year it is: 'To Hope and Act for Creation'. In the letter of St Paul to the Romans, the biblical image pictures the Earth as a Mother, groaning as in childbirth (Rom 8:22). Francis of Assisi understood this when he referred to the Earth as our sister and our mother in his Canticle of Creatures. The times we live in show that we are not relating to the Earth as a gift from our Creator, but rather as a resource to be used.

And yet, there is hope and the expectation for a better future. To hope in a biblical context does not mean to stand still and in silence, but rather groaning, crying, and actively striving for new life amidst the struggles. Just as in childbirth, we go through a period of intense pain, but new life springs forth.

Creation, and all of us, are called to worship the Creator, working together for a future of hope and action. Only when we work together with Creation can the 'first fruits of hope' be born. Pauline theology reminds us that both Creation and humanity are conceived from the beginning in Christ and, therefore, are entrusted to each other.

The Stations

The way we will focus on the Season is through a series of readings as we visit seven Stations during a walk from the Cathedral to St George's Church in Harnham. Following a reading, we will reflect on how our actions are affecting people and the natural environment.

The walk itself should be seen as part of our celebration of Creation; therefore, be mindful of signs of created life: the flowers, trees, animals, insects, the waters and sky, and of course people. Also, notice how our intervention has ‘moulded’ the landscape and created, for good or bad, an artificial environment. We live in a frenetically busy time, always looking to what we can be doing next; rarely do we pause in the present, in contemplation and prayer – this walk provides an opportunity.

1st Station

[Green opposite Mompesson House].

We begin our walk at a pre-eminent city locale – the Cathedral Close. The Cathedral was built in the early thirteenth century and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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.

Reflection:

What a positive attitude to start the day!

Standing at this place, a place of immense religious significance that manifests the glory of God our Creator, we begin by reflecting on the magnificence of Creation. We seldom appreciate the beauty and goodness that is all around us, be it in the people we meet or in the natural environment. Pope Benedict emphasises the Church's responsibility towards Creation when he says, 'she [the Church] must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of Creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction.' He goes on to say: 'The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.'

Pause in Silence

Prayer:

Our Father ...

2nd Station

Here we are at the first of the Cathedral's exhibits that depict the impact of climate change. Coastal erosion is but one of the themes explored in the artwork.

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.

Pause in Silence

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the light by which we see our way in your world, and the capability you give us to harness it for good. Grant us an awareness of how we abuse your gifts and the courage to change. Fill us with both the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to seek Your loving forgiveness, and the strength to speak out when necessary.

Amen

3rd Station

[Entrance to Elizabeth Gardens].

The parkland, which stretches out in front of us, was created during the 1960s on land that was formerly used as market gardens and a nursery. Parks in England, however, were first laid out at a time of urban expansion so that people who were living in overcrowded, often squalid conditions, could enjoy these open spaces with opportunities

for fresh air, recreation, and where people could relax and come together with family and friends. They also became places of education, allowing people to appreciate the beauty of the flora and fauna all around them.

Reading from the Book of Genesis (1:12):

God said, 'Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees bearing fruit with their seed inside, on the earth'. And so it was. The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seed in their several kinds, and trees bearing fruit with their seed in their several kinds. God saw that it was good.

Reflection:

Parks and gardens are particularly important places, not only for people's well-being, but also for the natural environment, and they should therefore be valued and protected. Greater consideration should be given to the way they are managed for the benefit of the flora and fauna by, for example, planting 'wilderness' or wild areas. Gardens also have a particular significance in the Bible and are mentioned several times. The first was the Garden of Eden from where the: 'Lord God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden' (Gen.2:9). Gardens are tranquil places that are steeped in the symbolism of re-birth and of hope.

Pause in Silence

Prayer:

God of creation, in thanking you for the world you have created and given us to care for, we ask your forgiveness for the times we abuse your planet; for the times when we destroy rather than protect, and

for failing to observe the beauty of your world. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen**

4th Station

[Confluence of the River Avon and River Nadder within Elizabeth Gardens].

Here we are at the confluence of two major rivers, the Avon, which drains the Pewsey Vale and much of Salisbury Plain, and the Nadder, which rises near Shaftesbury and flows through the Vale of Wardour. Although today this area is of little consequence for many, its true significance is that these rivers would have been a major factor in the decision to site the city here.

Reading from the Canticle of the Sun

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour; and bears a likeness of you, Most High. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Reflection:

The reading is the first part of St Francis's 'Canticle of the Sun', also known as 'Praise of the Creatures'. The canticle emphasises how connected we really are to the renewable energy of both the sun and the moon. We know how dark it is on a moonless night and how the Earth cools rapidly when there's a solar eclipse. We also know that one of the hopeful advances of recent years has been the development of solar power, and to a lesser extent the harnessing of tidal power, which makes use of the phases of the moon.

Pause in Silence

Prayer:

As we are focus on the climate emergency we continue with St Francis's 'Canticle of the Sun':

'Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which
You give sustenance to your creatures'

5th Station

[At the exit to the Park, by a copse of young trees on the right]

At this point, we are leaving the parkland and crossing an area of meadowland, which is in sharp contrast to the manicured parkland and Salisbury's built environment.

Poem: When I am Among the Trees (Mary Oliver)

When I am Among The Trees,
especially the Willows and the Honey Locust, equally the Beech, the
Oaks and the Pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they Save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have Goodness, and Discernment,

and never hurry through the world
but walk Slowly, and Bow often.

Around me the Trees stir in their leaves and call out, 'Stay awhile'.
The Light flows from their branches.

And they call again, 'It's simple', they say, 'and you too have come into the world to do this, to Go Easy, to be filled with light, and to shine'.

Reflection:

We need to constantly aware that we live in the midst of a climate emergency that threatens all of Creation, including the natural environment, such as the trees we see around us. How often do we pause and ponder the beauty of creation? In the book: 'The Hidden Life of Trees', the author describes how trees nurture and support one-another and how they are reliant on neighbouring trees for their well-being above and below ground. However, by our actions and ignorance, we have upset the rich biodiversity to the detriment of all. We are witnessing the effects of climate change everywhere, such as the huge forest fires that are now an annual event in Europe, the USA and Canada. In Brazil and the Far East, deforestation of the rain forests is exacerbating an already fragile situation. All these 'events' are causing incalculable damage to the eco-system and displacing whole townships.

Pause in Silence

Prayer:

Almighty God, we too often ignore the plight and suffering of your creatures. We acknowledge that many species are threatened or endangered with extinction. We abhor what we have done, and what we have failed to do for species that are struggling to survive. Help us to live in a way that does not endanger life, but cherishes and nourishes all that is around us. Help us also to remember that we, too, are your creation: vulnerable and interdependent. **Amen**

6th Station

[Harnham Water Meadows]

Here we see an example of how we have harnessed the power of water, not only to 'float' the water meadows to produce an early crop of grass for the sheep, but also to drive the mills that once peppered the landscape. This process has, inadvertently, created a rich biodiversity but they are also an example of the need to co-operate with one another, in this case between the miller and meadow manager.

Poem: 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.

You made the sea and shaped the dry land.
The depths of the earth are in Your hand.
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.

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 have strayed from the way of truth and what is right.
We are silenced in the radiance of Your light.

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.

Prayer:

In a world cluttered with talk and opinion, let us take a moment in
silence to listen to our hearts as we pray: 'Lord in the silence let my
ears be open and attentive to your voice.' **Amen.**

Pause in Silence

7th Station

[Church of St George, East Harnham]

In this churchyard we see how a parish community is raising
awareness of the climate crisis by having areas set aside as wilderness
gardens, thus encouraging the flora and fauna. Here is an example of
hope, hope in action, demonstrating how small actions can have an
impact on the environment. It also emulates St Francis, who wanted
'part of his friary garden always left untouched so that wild flowers
and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their

minds to God, the Creator of such beauty' (LS.12). This beauty and the love of God is encapsulated in the writings of Julian of Norwich.

Reading: The Hazel Nut (Julian of Norwich)

'God showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand. I looked upon it and wondered, "What might this be?" And I was answered, "It is all Creation."

I marvelled how it could last, for I thought it might suddenly fall to nothing, it was so small. And I was answered, "It lasts and ever shall last, for God loves it.'

In this little hazel nut, I saw three truths: the first is that God made it; the second is that God loves it; and the third is that God keeps it safe.'

Prayer:

Father, Lord of all Creation, we praise you with all your creatures and the whole universe that comes forth from the work of your hands. We acknowledge the privilege and responsibility that you give us as stewards of your Creation. In our ignorance we have done damage to our common home and our sisters and brothers are suffering. Through faithfully following your Son, guide and direct us to work for a better future. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son.

Amen