

# *Stations of Creation*



## Stations of Creation

For some years, Christians have been celebrating a Season of Creation, which starts on the 1<sup>st</sup> September and ends on the Feast of St Francis on 4<sup>th</sup> October. It is an ecumenical celebration of prayer and action for the common home and a time when we can celebrate everything in God's creation, as well as reflect on the ways in which our lives may be damaging it.

### The Stations

The way we will focus on this Season is through the Creation narrative from the Book of Genesis by visiting seven Stations during a walk from the Cathedral to St George's Church in Harnham, each Station marking one of the seven days of Creation. Following a reading from Genesis, there will be a passage from Pope Francis's Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*. This will be followed by a reflection on how our actions are affecting people and the natural environment. There will then be a moment of silence and prayer.

The walk itself should also be seen as part of our celebration of creation; therefore, we should be mindful of signs of created life: flowers, trees, animals, insects, and 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 or to the future; rarely do we pause in the present, in contemplation and prayer – this walk provides an opportunity.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how fragile we actually are and that we are 'intertwined' with others and with nature. Today, while we are still in the throes of the pandemic, let us imagine a post-Covid world. "What kind of world", Pope Francis has asked, "do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are growing up".

#### 1st Station

[Green opposite Mompesson House].

We begin our Stations 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.

#### Reading:

In the beginning God created heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the water. God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. God saw that light was good, and God divided light from darkness. God called light 'day' and darkness he called 'night' (*Gn. 1-5*).

#### Reading from *Laudato Si*

The creation accounts in the book of Genesis ... suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour, and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God .... (*Laudato Si*, 66).

### Reflection:

Standing at this place, a place of immense spiritual significance that manifests the glory of God our creator, we begin by reflecting on the beginning of time and our relationship with all that God has created. We seldom appreciate the beauty and goodness that is all around us, be it in people we meet or in the natural environment, which we routinely exploit for our own reward. Pope Benedict XVI emphasises the Church's responsibility towards creation, which he asserts should be manifested in the public sphere. "In so doing, 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:

Lord Jesus Christ, 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**

### **2nd Station**

[Church House]

The corner of High Street and Crane Street is a significant point in the development of Salisbury and the laying out of the planned medieval town. The alignment of the High Street would suggest that it marks the former route from Old Sarum to a river crossing near Harnham Bridge. Crane Street, which continues beyond High Street as New Street, is the alignment for the remainder of the medieval street pattern.

### Reading:

God said, "Let there be a vault in the waters to divide the waters in two". And so it was. God made the vault, and it divided the waters above the vault from the waters under the vault. God called the vault 'heaven' (*Gn. 6-8*).

### Reading from *Laudato Si'*

Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion. Jesus reminded us that we have God as our common Father and that this makes us brothers and sisters. Fraternal love can only be freely given; it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done to us ... This same gratuitousness inspires us to love and accept the wind, the sun, and the clouds, even though we cannot control them. In this sense, we can speak of a 'universal fraternity' (*Laudato Si'*, 228).

### Reflection

We are mindful of the fractures and discord that have been wrought in our country, and although a degree of harmony exists, tensions never seem far from the surface. We have become increasingly intolerant of the views of others and are quick to judge. Harm and division

have also been caused between our fellow Christians, as well as people of other religions or none, by prejudice and pre-conceived notions. Pope John Paul II encapsulates this when he says: “Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God’s gift to man”. In other words, we are all brothers and sisters in God., and in the words of the psalmist, “How good and how pleasant it is, brothers [and sisters] dwelling in unity!” (Ps. 133:1).

### *Pause in Silence*

#### Prayer:

Let us pray for the whole human family whose livelihood and well-being depends on the well-being of the Earth. Heavenly Father, we implore your forgiveness for the way people have been exploited either in their own countries, or when they seek a better life elsewhere; for those who feel lonely and for those who feel abandoned in our own community.

Ever mindful of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ that: “in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me”. Let us reflect: have I seen the Lord in my brothers and sisters? Do I give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and the prisoner?

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Station**

[Entrance to Elizabeth Gardens].

This parkland was created during the 1960s on land that was formerly market gardens and a nursery, and in the eighteenth century there was also a bowling green. Parks in England were created at a time of rapid urban expansion so that people living in overcrowded, squalid conditions could enjoy these open spaces with opportunities for fresh air, recreation, where people could relax and come together with family and friends. They also became places of education, allowing people to appreciate the flora and fauna.

#### Reading:

God said, “Let the waters under the heaven come together into a single mass, and let dry land appear”. God called the dry land ‘earth’ and the mass of waters ‘seas’ ... 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 (*Gn.1:11-12*).

#### Reading from *Laudato Si*

We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man ‘dominion’ over the earth has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible ... The texts are to be read in their context, ... recognizing that they tell us to ‘till and keep’ the garden of the world (cf. *Gen 2:15*). ‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. (*Laudato Si*, 67).

### 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 gardens and parks are managed for the benefit of the flora and fauna by, for example, planting 'wilderness' gardens. 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*). For some, gardens were regarded as tranquil places which are steeped in the symbolism of re-birth, hope, - paradise.

### *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:

God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of heaven to divide day from night, and let them indicate festivals, days and years. Let them be lights in the vault of heaven shine on the earth." And so it was. God made the two lights: the greater light to govern the day, the smaller light to govern the night, and the stars. God set them in the vault of heaven to shine on the earth, to govern the day and the night and to divide light from darkness (*Gn.1, 14-18*).

### Reading from *Laudato Si'*

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 (*Laudato Si'*, 87).

### Reflection:

The reading from *Laudato Si'* is the first part of St Francis of Assisi'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 (but only in the absence of light pollution) 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:

At this time, as we are focus on the climate emergency, and when our thoughts are never far from the pandemic, 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.

#### Reading:

God said, "Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth within the vault of heaven". And so it was. God created great sea-serpents and every kind of living creature within which the waters teem, and every kind of winged creature. God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth" (Gn.1, 20-23).

#### Reading from *Laudato Si'*

... each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us ... May the power and the light of the grace we have received also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world around us. In this way, we will help nature nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied (*Laudato Si'*, 221).

#### Reflection:

We need to constantly remind ourselves 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. Peter Wohlleben, author of the book entitled: 'The Hidden Life of Trees', describes how they 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 in Europe and the USA. 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 man has 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 pepper 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.

The renowned artist, John Constable, came to Salisbury frequently to paint landscapes that depicted his emotional response to the scenes that inspired him here. *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* was one such painting, which was painted after the death of his wife, conveying the torment and grief.

### Reading:

God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living creature in its own species: cattle, reptiles, and wild beasts." And so it was. God made every kind of wild beast, every kind of cattle, and every kind of land reptile. God saw that it was good... God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female, he created them... God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good. (*Gn.1,24-31*).

### A Reading from *Laudato Si'*

Our insistence that every human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God (*Laudato Si'*, 84)

### Reflection:

Water is a precious resource. Here in England, we have become accustomed to a ready supply of water, but with the increasing climate crisis our seasons have become less predictable, and we are now witnessing periods of drought as well as torrential rain.

We have become increasingly alarmed at the situation elsewhere, in places such as the Middle East and Yemen that experience drought and famine, largely brought on by the actions of man. Water levels have dropped dramatically in many rivers in many countries, causing tensions between farmers and urban populations, each vying for a diminishing resource. In England, rivers are 'suffocating' in the raw sewage that is spewing into them due to the intensification of livestock farming. Meadows and peat bogs have dramatically diminished in area over the past half century. Although we recognise the importance of the natural environment, we generally ignore it.

### *Pause in Silence*

#### 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.**

#### **7th Station**

[Church of St George, East Harnham]

In this churchyard we see how a parish community is playing its part in raising awareness of the climate crisis.

#### Reading:

Thus heaven and earth were completed with all their array. On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing. He rested on the seventh day after all the work he had been doing. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he rested after all his work of creating. Such were the origins of heaven and earth when they were created (*Gn.2,1-4*).

#### A Reading from *Laudato Si*

God... commanded Israel to set aside each seventh day as a day of rest, a Sabbath. Similarly, every seven years, a sabbatical year was set aside for Israel, a complete rest for the land, when sowing was forbidden and one reaped only what was necessary to live on and to feed one’s household. Finally, after seven weeks of years, which is to say forty-nine years, the Jubilee was celebrated as a year of general forgiveness and ‘liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants’ (cf. Lev. 25:10). This law came about as an attempt to ensure balance and fairness in their relationships with others and with the land on which they lived and worked. At the same time, it was an acknowledgment that the gift of the earth with its fruits belongs to everyone ... (*Laudato Si*,71).

### *Pause in Silence*

#### Reflection:

The biblical concept of jubilee points us towards restoring a balance in the very systems of life: the need for equality, justice and sustainability, and for a voice in defence of our common home. This year, amid the crises that have shaken our world, we’re especially aware of the urgent need to heal our relationships with creation and one-another.

#### 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**