

Celebrating Creationtide

Opening Music: *from “Autumn” by Glazunov*

Welcome: Good morning, and welcome, everyone. All are welcome here, whether you are a regular attender, or a new-comer, in person or via Zoom. Whatever you bring in your heart: whether you come in sadness, or joy or out of curiosity, what-ever your faith or none, you are welcome! Today we celebrate ‘Creationtide’, of which more shortly. First, we start as is our custom, by lighting our chalice flame as a symbol of our free religious faith, and if you are at home, and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

Chalice Lighting: “We light this chalice: may its light and warmth radiate from it, to cheer and strengthen this community and out into the wider world beyond our doors, as a river, reaches ever wider, from bank to bank, then joining the sea, and reaching ever wider, as waves in that sea, spread from shore to distant shore.”

Introduction: September and the first week in October have been celebrated as ‘Creationtide’ by several mainstream Christian denominations for several decades. The season starts 1st September, with a Day of Prayer for Creation, and ends on 4th October, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, beloved by many Christian denominations. During the month-long celebration, the world’s 2.2 billion Christians come together to care for our common home. That is the theme of my service this morning, reflected in our hymns, prayers and readings Some of these come from special Anglican and Scottish Eco Congregation Creationtide resources. I’ll be telling you more in my address To start, some opening words, from those resources

Opening Words:

The symbol for Creationtide 2023 is a Mighty River, representing Rivers of Justice for all creation. Here are some words from Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Amos: Prophet Isaiah proclaims: “Listen carefully, I am about to do a new thing, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even put a road in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43: 19)

Prophet Amos cries out: “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5: 24) And so we are called to join the river of justice and peace, for climate and ecological justice, and to speak out with and for those communities most impacted by climate injustice and the loss of biodiversity. How best to share and love our world, as expressed in our first hymn, so let us join in singing Hymn: 216 Wide green world, we know and love you

1st Hymn: 216 ‘Wide green world’

Melody ‘Schmucke Dich’ by Johann Cruger. Words, June D.Bell.

Wide green world, we know and love you:
 clear blue skies that arch above you,
 moon-tugged oceans rising, falling,
 summer rain and cuckoo calling.
 Some wild ancient ferment bore us,
 us and all that went before us:
 life in desert, forest, mountain,
 life in stream and springing fountain.

We know how to mould and tame you,
 we have power to mar and maim you.
 Show us by your silent growing
 that which we should all be knowing:
 we are of you, not your master,
 we who plan supreme disaster.
 If with careless greed we use you
 Inch by extinct inch we lose you.

May our births and deaths remind us
 others still will come behind us.
 That they also may enjoy you
 we with wisdom will employ you.
 That our care may always bless you
 teach us we do not possess you.
 We are part and parcel of you.
 Wide green world, we share and love you.

1st Prayers: Opening Prayer (Adapted from one by Lancelot Andrewes, English Bishop who oversaw the Authorized Version of King James Bible in 1611)

Blessed are you, Creator of all. To you be praise and glory forever as your dawn renews the face of the Earth, bringing light and life to all creation, bring hope to your people. May we rejoice in this day you have made: open our eyes to behold your presence and strengthen our hands to work for justice for all of creation, that the world may rejoice together and give you praise. *A M E N*

‘A prayer for all’ based on one by Rev.Cliff Reed, retired Unitarian Minister.
 “We hold in our thoughts and prayers, all in our church community, and our families, friends and neighbours in the wider community who are in need of solace. We hold in our thoughts today especially, the many thousands of people affected by the damage to the environment and its wildlife, caused by too much water, as in flooding in parts of USA, or too little water, as in the wildfires which affected many countries this year, from Canada to Crete. We also hold in our hearts the many thousands affected by the recent dreadful earthquake in Morocco. Peace for those who have died, and for the survivors, may they have all the help and support they need.

For the sick, may there be healing and strength.
 For the distressed may there be peace and tranquility of spirit.
 For the embittered may there be reconciliation and a new beginning.
 For the despairing, may there be faith and rekindled joy
 For the fearful, may there be courage and unquenchable hope
 For the poor and oppressed, may there be better times ahead

With trembling hands we reach out to all our neighbours, those near by or afar, who are suffering in any way. May love and life flow out through us to restore, to relieve and to re-create ... AMEN”

Story: 'The Grey Fountain' story by Pedro Pablo Sacristan, read by Ann

Once upon a time, a boy was walking through a wood and he thought he could hear a sad cry, as though someone was crying while singing. Following the sound he came to a big, round, mysterious, grey fountain. The sad sobbing seemed to be coming from the fountain pool. The boy swept aside the pool's dirty surface water and saw a group of grey fish swimming in a slow circle through the pond. With each lap they made, their little voices opened and out came the sobbing sound.

Amused by this, the boy tried to catch one of these incredible talking fish. But when he stuck his arm into the water it turned grey right up to the elbow. As this happened, a huge sadness entered into him, and he suddenly understood how sorrowful the fish was feeling. He felt just like the earth on his arm; dirty and contaminated.

He quickly pulled his arm out of the water, and ran from that place. But the arm stayed grey, and the boy continued feeling sad. He tried so many times to cheer himself up, but nothing worked. That was, until he realised that if he were to make the Earth happy then that happiness would be, in turn, transmitted back to him, through the earth on his arm.

From then on he set about looking after the countryside. He cared for the plants, he did what he could to keep the water from being polluted, and he encouraged others to do the same. He was so successful that his hand started to recover its normal colour. When the grey had disappeared completely, he started feeling happy again, and he decided to go and visit the fountain. When he was still some way from the fountain he could hear the fish singing happy hymns, and he heard them joyfully splashing in the crystal clear waters of that magic fountain.

It was plain to see that the Earth had returned to its original happiness; and the boy felt even happier at the sight. (350 words)

A Poem: 'The Tide River' by Charles Kingsley 1819 – 1875

Clear and cool, clear and cool,
By laughing shallow and dreaming pool;
Cool and clear, cool and clear,
By shining shingle and foaming weir;
Under the crag where the ouzel sings,
And the ivied wall where the church-bell rings,
Undeiled, for the undeiled;
Play by me, bathe in me, mother and child.

Dank and foul, dank and foul,
By the smoky town in its murky cowl;
Foul and dank, foul and dank,
By wharf and sewer and slimy bank;
Darker and darker the farther I go,
Baser and baser the richer I grow;
Who dare sport with the sin-deiled?
Shrink from me, turn from me, mother and child.

Strong and free, strong and free,
The flood-gates are open, away to the sea.
Free and strong, free and strong,

Cleansing my streams as I hurry along,
To the golden sands, and the leaping bar,
And the taintless tide that awaits me afar.
As I lose myself in the infinite main,
Like a soul that has sinned and is pardoned again,
Undefined, for the undefined;
Play by me, bathe in me, mother and child

2nd Story: Thelma reads 'Four candles'

Four candles slowly burned. The atmosphere was so soft one could almost hear them talking. The first candle said, "I am Peace. The world is so full of anger and fighting that nothing can keep me alight." Then the candle of Peace went out completely.

The second candle said, "I am the candle of Faith. I am no longer indispensable. It does not make any sense that I stay awake one moment longer." Then a breeze softly blew out Faith's flame.

Sadly, the third candle began to speak, "I am Love. People don't understand my importance so they put me aside. They even forget to love those nearest them. I don't have the strength to stay alight." And, waiting no longer, the candle of love went out.

A child entered the room where the candles were and saw that three of them were unlit. "Why are you not burning?" said the child. "You are supposed to stay alight until the very end." And the child was frightened and began to cry.

The fourth candle said, "Don't be afraid, I am Hope, and while I am burning, we can re-light the other candles."

With shining eyes, the child took the candle of Hope, and re-lit the other candles.

2nd Hymn: 84 'Justice for persons'

Melody: 'Georgina' by David Dawson: Words ©Andrew M. Hill. Used by permission.

Justice for persons and for different nations,
respect the diverse species in our care,
community of life on earth sustaining,
love for this planet which we all must share.

Compassion is the strength of love and sympathy
letting us share another's pain;
creature or human, loving friend or stranger,
love for each other is the whole world's gain.

Wisdom is insight clear, precise and thoughtful,
searching for truth and human law refined;
guidance from past, made ready for the future
by the best reasoning of the human mind.

Integrity, with honour and uprightness:
these are the qualities which form and make
woman and men, the people for tomorrow,
those who serve others for another's sake.

Justice, compassion, wisdom and integrity,
these are the virtues which our poor world needs.
They'll flower tomorrow, fruit in glorious splendor,
if we today go out and plant the seeds.

2nd Prayers:

(Adapted from Prayers of the People, the Church of the Four Winds, Portland Oregon)

In peace, we pray to you, Loving Spirit,
We call upon the Earth, our planet home, with its beautiful depths, soaring heights and deep waters, its vitality and abundance of life, and together we ask:
That it may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the mountains and deserts, the high green valleys and meadows filled with wild flowers, the snows, the summits of intense silence, and we ask:
That they may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the land which grows our food, the nurturing soil, the fertile fields, the abundant gardens and orchards,:

We call upon the forests, the great trees reaching strongly to the sky with earth in their roots and the heavens in their branches, the fir and the pine and the cedar and the oak, and we ask: ***That they may teach us and show us the way.***

We call upon the creatures of the fields and forests and the seas, our brothers and sisters the wolves and deer, the eagle and dove, the great whales and the dolphin. We ask: ***That they may teach us and show us the way.***

We call upon all who have lived on this earth, our ancestors and our friends, who dreamed the best for future generations, and upon whose lives our lives are built, and with thanksgiving, we call upon them too ...
That they may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the nations of the world and their leaders to hear and heed the cry of all who have suffered loss of homes, community buildings and resources, lives and hope because of climate change and other environmental problems. We pray for justice and for peace for them: ***May they teach us and show us the way.***

We pray for all victims of war and violence, and for countries where the greed for oil and gas are leading to war.

We hold in our hearts those places where fossil fuel projects have destabilised communities and human rights abuses have occurred. We pray for areas where climate change has led to drought, and conflict over water and resources is happening. May we respond to the cry of the Earth and those living in poverty, as peacemakers who challenge the violence that threatens us all.
May they teach us and show us the way.

Creator, you made the world and declared it to be good: May the beauty of the trees, the softness of the air, the fragrance of the grass speak to us; the summit of the mountains, the thunder of the sky, the rhythm of the lakes, May they speak to us; the faintness of the stars, the freshness of the morning, the dewdrops on the flower, may all speak to us and show us the way May it be, *Amen.*

A Prayer of Awareness

Light
golden light
fresh from the source.

Colours
creation's colours
calling our senses.

Life
life in its oneness
life in its manifold oneness
all from You.

You are the Sun from whom the morning shines
You are the River in whom each life-form flows
Each face
Each race
Each cell within our ever-living soul.
This new day we greet You.

Let us be still and become aware ...

Approximately 2 minutes of silence ; then

Video of river. Sounds of running water,during which people may light
Candles of Joy and Concern.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

ADDRESS – Celebration of Creationtide

This time of year, with the gentle transition from late summer into early autumn, often blessed with some of the best weather, such as we've enjoyed this past week, is one of my favourites, as it seems to be for quite a lot of folk. Although in this country, we are used to January 1st as the beginning of the year, the tradition of starting a new year with autumn was common to the lands of the Bible and many of the lands around the Mediterranean. Their summer harvest was completed, the crops were stored, and people prepared for a new agricultural cycle. It was an appropriate time to begin a new year. And even in this country, September is for many people a time of new beginnings, for seeing anew, as Rev Kate's Service reminded us in her lovely service, last week.

Several faiths mark new beginnings around this time. Jews mark Rosh Hashanah, New Year, one of their most important festivals, leading to the solemn Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement, repenting of past bad deeds and starting anew. Muslims celebrate Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. Hindu's celebrate the Birthday of Ganesh, the Elephant headed god of good fortune and new beginnings. Rastafarians celebrate Ethiopian New Year, with each one in a 4 year cycle being named after one of the evangelists. The Chinese celebrate birthday of Confucius, another new beginning.

So a good time to celebrate Creation, and give it a special tile: 'Creationtide'. How did this come about, and what does it involve?

In the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, the church year starts on 1st September with a day of prayer celebrating all Creation to commemorate God's creation of the world. According to some sources, they also believe that Jesus began his preaching on 1st September in Nazareth, so their Church year begins on this date. In 1989 their Patriarch Dimitrios I suggested that this special date should be observed as a day "**of protection of the natural environment**". Ten years later the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) encouraged churches to adopt a Time for Creation extending from 1 September to 4 October, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of Ecology. The 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania in 2007 endorsed this, and recommended that the time "be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change".

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) encourages and helps churches of various denominations to observe Creation Time. These include suggestions on a ways in which churches, groups and individuals could focus on the theme at this season.

Pope Francis, who took his Papal name in honour of St Francis, warmly welcomed all these ideas, and made Creationtide official for Roman Catholics in 2015, urging everyone to "*listen to the voice of creation*". So, Creationtide is now an ecumenical Season. During this month-long celebration, the world's 2.2 billion Christians come together to care for our common home, planet Earth, and all its inhabitants. It is also Harvest Festival season, a time of thanksgiving for all which sustains us, especially our food. Our Unitarian Object, agreed over 20 years ago, includes the celebration of life and respect for all creation, so it seems appropriate for us too, to celebrate Creationtide. Although we might not follow traditional lectionary, and we often express ourselves quite differently to the mainstream churches, we agree with the ethos and sentiments.

Pope Francis' message for the Day of Creation, was presented at a press conference at the Holy See, with Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and Tomás Insua, Executive Director of Laudato Si' Movement. Francis said "*May our common home overflow with life once again.*" He referred to the effects of human abuse of our natural environment as a war, saying that "*the effects of this war can be seen in so many rivers that are drying up,*" in large part, because "*our rapacious consumerism, fueled by selfish hearts, is disrupting the planet's water cycle.*"

He continued "*our unbridled burning of fossil fuels and the destruction of forests that are raising temperatures and provoking great droughts*".... "*the terrible shortage of water increasingly besets our homes, from small rural communities to large cities.*"

The commentators said, "Pope Francis updates the biblical image of the river to the 21st century, calling attention to the physical rivers that we mistreat so much today, proving to be a stark image of the ecological crisis". They observed that unlike many world leaders, who might be described as subservient to corporate interests", Francis didn't beat about the bush about the powerful interests driving the destruction." He called on "*all people of good will*" to bring about a "*transformation of our hearts, our lifestyles and the public policies that govern our societies.*"

Well I'm sure that The Pope's theology and mine may differ widely, but it gives me hope, that we seem to share similar views on important environmental issues, and that this prominent leader, is speaking out on behalf of the under privileged of all communities, asking for change for the better.

In the piece Thelma read, Hope was certainly very important in enabling other good qualities: Peace, Faith and Love, to survive. All these are important qualities for anyone who is working hard to help our environment. I'd like to put this into context by sharing a personal experience from about 20 years ago.

When I was in the Plymouth Friends of the Earth group, we ran a recruiting evening at which the then Director was due to speak. He had to travel from London by train. The starting time for the meeting drew ever nearer, but there was no sign of him. There were a lot of people in the room, quite a few were group members, as well as many visitors (potential new members, I thought, hopefully!) The start time arrived but the speaker did not. What to do, to stop them from leaving and maybe losing them for ever? I'd almost given up hope, but luckily a group member, Don Allen, a member of this congregation, who some of you will remember, had a whole load of slides, which he started showing in his elderly projector. He managed to keep the audience enthralled and entertained until our speaker eventually arrived. He had missed his original train from London, and had to catch a later one. He was amazed and delighted that everyone was still there waiting patiently. He said then that one of the most important qualities for any environmentalist was Patience. Some 20 years later, I wonder whether being patient may have run its course. We can't afford to sit patiently now, as environmental destruction gathers its scary pace.

The four qualities in Thelma's reading are equally, if not more, important now.

Peace: when nations are at war, the use of weapons of destruction damages and kills not only humans, but also other species, and their habitats. The after effects can last for decades eg missiles, landmines, emissions, toxins like Agent Orange. The Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary, World Council of Churches says, *"We live in very turbulent and troubling times as we continue to struggle for world peace and the reconciliation and unity of all creation. We are surrounded by war, violence, climate challenges and unjust systems that dehumanise and oppress people around the globe. Christians are urged to join with God in the ever-flowing river for justice and peace in the world."* War wearies people, who are too busy fighting for their own survival to live sustainably. True Peace gives people the chance to live more in tune with their environment. With Peace, comes a twin, **Justice:** Today's climate and ecological emergency hurts the most vulnerable, many living in the least wealthy nations, who have contributed the fewest emissions. Indigenous peoples make up five percent of the world's population and protect nearly 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity. They deserve justice. Justice includes paying historic debts. At a global level, nations with power and wealth have a duty to deal justly and honestly with communities that suffer most from the climate and ecological crises. Global South nations, working together for more than 30 years, managed to win a victory at COP27 in making wealthier nations realise their moral duty to provide financing for loss and damage

Now we are more aware than ever of the link between fossil fuels, and violence and war. We can, however, dream and work for a world where each country produces the energy they need from God-given gifts of the sun and wind, rather than going to war for fossil fuels.

An economy of peace can be built instead of an economy based on conflict, which makes for a more just world for all. .

Faith: One has to have faith that actions beneficial to the environment, however small they may seem, can make a cumulative positive difference. In the story of the grey fountain, which Ann read, the little boy did what he could to look after the country side and

stop the pollution to the water. You could say he had faith that his actions could make a difference, and eventually they did. Our individual actions during the Season of Creation are important. Celebrating creation, taking part in clean-ups, planting trees, and reducing our carbon footprint are some of the immediate actions we can take. They won't move the mountain, but will lessen the steepness of the slope for those who follow us.

Love: For **all** creation, as well as for human beings. Unless we love, or care for it, how can we have a true perspective on the value of each part of the whole?

Hope: according to the old Greek myth, when all the ills of the world were released from Pandora's box, what remained was Hope. We need Hope now more than ever: hope that humankind has realised in time that if we act NOW, to prevent further damage we can still turn things around.

We must make visible peace *with* Earth and *on* Earth, at the same time that justice calls us to repentance and a change of attitude and actions. As we join the river of justice and peace with others then instead of despair, Hope is created. We must not let this chance slip through our fingers. This world is truly wonderful, still has so much variety, interest and beauty, so we must celebrate and enjoy, and pass on to future generations. We must care for it!

In a joint statement, Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury say, *"Future generations will never forgive us if we miss the opportunity to protect our common home. We have inherited a garden; we must not leave a desert for our children."*

So what can we do? As a church, our power is supplied by more sustainable company, our investments are with more ethical organisations, we use environmentally friendly cleaning materials, and recycled paper, we serve Fair Trade tea and coffee, and our garden is filled with pollinator friendly plants, with two bee hotels to provide safe living quarters! Some of our members have joined marches for Climate justice in the capital, to raise awareness at parliamentary level.

We can do similar at home. We can also sign petitions and write to our representatives at a local and parliamentary level. We can support and encourage one another in these efforts, and in looking for more ways of helping, and most importantly, keep the flames of Peace, Faith, Love and Hope alive!

I close with some cautiously optimistic words from Church of England Bishop, Olivia Graham, of the Diocese of Reading, *"There has never before been a time, in the history of human existence, when we have so gravely threatened not only our own existence, but that of the rest of the living world. **But it's not too late to act, if we do it now, if we do it all together...AMEN**"*

Final Hymn: 66 'How wonderful this world of thine'

Melody 'Nesfield' by David Dawson; Words by Fredrick Pratt Green © 1950 Used by permission

How wonderful this world of thine,
a fragment of a fiery sun,
how lovely and how small,
where all things serve thy great design,
where life's adventure is begun
in God, the life of all.

The smallest seed in secret grows,
and thrusting upward answers soon
the bidding of the light;
the bud unfurls into a rose;
the wings within the whole cocoon
are perfected for flight.

The migrant bird in winter fled,
shall come gain with spring, and build
in this same shady tree;
by secret wisdom surely led,
homeward across the clover field
hurries the honey bee.

O thou, whose greater gifts are ours –
a conscious will, a thinking mind,
a heart to worship thee –
O take these strange unfolding powers,
and teach us through thy Word to find
the life more full and free.

Closing Words: A Yoruba poem from West Africa:

Enjoy the earth gently,
Enjoy the earth gently,
For if it is spoiled
It cannot be repaired
Enjoy the earth gently.

Extinguish Chalice **Closing Music: Video of Alabama playing 'Pass It on down'**