



A four-week course
for parishes &
other groups

CHRISTIANITY & CREATION GREEN DISCIPLESHIP FOR CORNWALL

Week 2: Biblical Resources



DIOCESE OF TRURO
DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM
GROWING THE CHURCH

WEEK 2: BIBLICAL RESOURCES

At the end of last week participants were invited to read and reflect on Psalm 104.

As an introductory exercise, ask the group if they have any comments or reflections to offer on anything that has occurred to them during the week.

This week we spend some time thinking about the resources available to us in the Bible to help us as we think about our Christian response to the environmental crisis. There is a great deal of material in the Bible which can help us here so in this session we can only look at a very small selection. Even here, you may need to be selective in choosing which Bible passages and which questions to discuss.

First we open with a short Bible reading and a prayer:

Read Isa 11: 1- 9 and spend a short time contemplating this passage alongside this picture painted by Edward Hicks in 1833. Hicks was an American Quaker and this is one of 62 paintings he did of the 'peaceable kingdom' vision in Isaiah.



Prayer

Creator God, breathing your own life into being,
you gave us the gift of life:
you placed us on this earth with its minerals and waters,
flowers and fruits, living creatures of grace and beauty.
You gave us the care of the earth.
Teach us, creator God of love,
that the earth and all its fullness are yours,
the world and all who dwell in it.
Call us yet again, to safeguard the gift of life.
Amen.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS: HOW DO WE READ THE BIBLE?

A strange question you might think. “I’ve been reading the Bible since I was a child” you might say. But we need to notice that ‘read’ in this context really means ‘interpret’ – which is what we always do when we are reading anything, but often without specifically noticing. There is no such thing as a ‘view from nowhere’, we always read from our own perspectives. It is not possible to be completely neutral, as if we were not influenced in our interpretations by our culture, education, world views etc.

For example, in reading a newspaper, the meaning we take from our reading is influenced by (a) our own perspective on the matters we are reading about and how much it matters to us, (b) the material we actually choose to read, (c) the views and purposes of the author of the material we read and (d) what the material actually says. All these come into play when we read the Bible.

In this course we are particularly thinking about how we might read scripture from a perspective of concern about environmental issues.

There is no such thing as a ‘view from nowhere’ when we read scripture. This means that we can consciously read through a ‘lens’ that can unlock new insights. i.e. deliberately read with ecological or ‘green’ lenses or eyes.

Discuss briefly:

How do you react to this idea? Does it make sense? Can you think of other examples of materials which you might read ‘through a particular lens’?

What do you think it might mean to read the Bible through an ‘ecological’ or green lens?



A SURPRISING THOUGHT?

It has sometimes been said that Christianity has a particular responsibility to bear for generating the environmental crisis - based in part on interpretations of Genesis 1.

In 1967 Lynn White Jr published a paper that has had significant resonances in the Christian world ever since. Essentially he held that Christian ways of thinking bear significant responsibility for the ecological crisis: Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen'.

White, pictured right, wrote: 'Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and re-feel our nature and destiny.'



PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

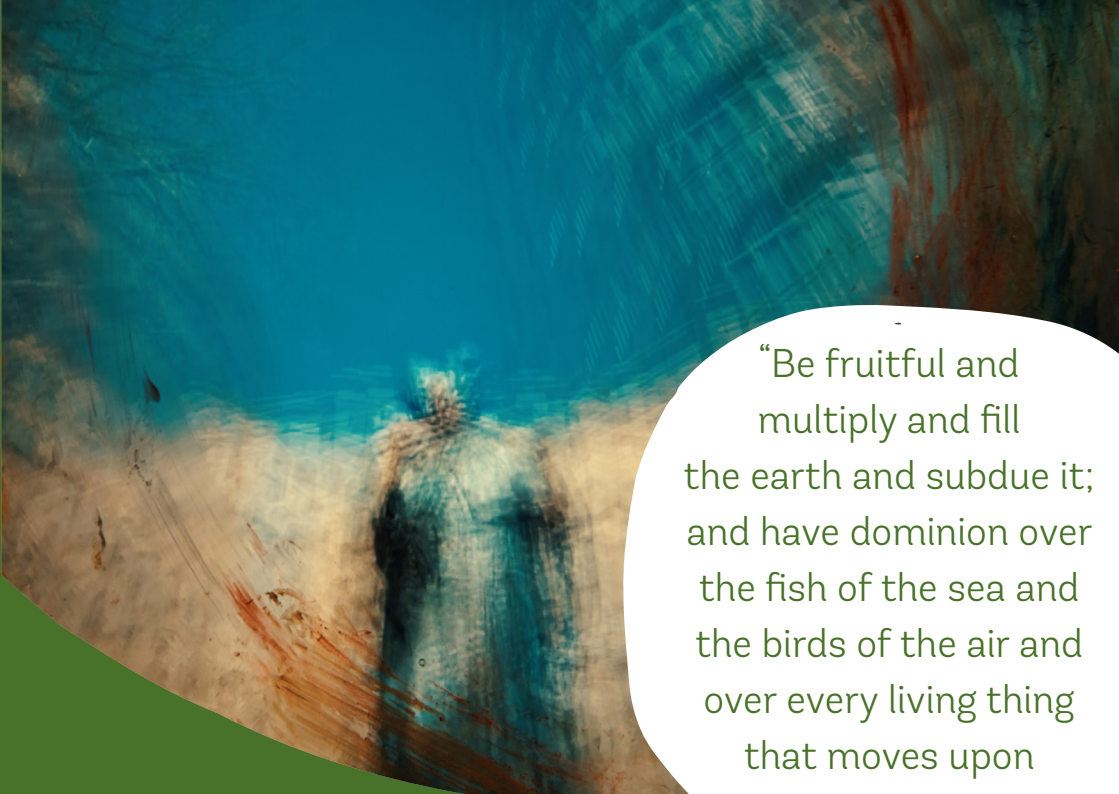
How do you react to this idea?

Does it surprise you? Does it worry you?

Do you think there might be something in it?

We go on now to look at just some of the biblical resources which can help us to reflect on how the Judeo-Christian tradition has viewed the relationships between God, humanity and the natural world. The material we shall have time to look at is only representative; we do not have time to take a comprehensive look.





“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”.

TWO CREATION STORIES

Although there are other creation myths* represented in the Bible, those in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are the most well-known.

Divide into two groups, one to look at Gen 1 and one Gen 2. For each account, consider:

What is portrayed about the relationship of God to the natural world?

What is portrayed about the relationship of God to humanity?

What is portrayed about the relationship of humanity to the natural world?

Take about 5–10 minutes for this exercise, then share reflections from both groups. Do we get any clues about why White (and others) may have thought Christianity’s legacy around the environment might be troubling?

* In this context, a myth is a folklore genre consisting of narratives that play a fundamental role in society, such as foundational tales. The main characters in myths are usually gods, demigods or supernatural beings.



SOME EXAMPLES FROM LEVITICUS: JUSTICE FOR LAND & PEOPLE?

Ch 19:9-20 'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges... or gather fallen grapes...leave them for the poor and the alien'.

Ch 25: 10 'You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants'.

25: 12 'For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces'.

25: 23 the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.

How do these texts relate to the idea of Sabbath? Does Sabbath only apply to people? What is the significance of Sabbath to caring for God's creation?

CAN THE LAND ITSELF SUFFER?

For the prophet Isaiah, the land suffers when the people are disobedient, eg Isa 24: 4: 'The earth dries up and withers...the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws...broken the everlasting covenant... Isa 24:19 the earth is utterly broken.... it staggers like a drunkard.'

And the converse is also true: eg Isa 35: 'The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing'.

This is just one of many places in the Bible where devastation of the land is associated with humanity's failure to live in God's ways. Where are there examples of this around us in the world today?

In the New Testament the Kingdom of God is a holistic concept, a vision for salvation that includes restoration, renewal, and re-creation of the entire universe. In many ways it was the main theme of Jesus' preaching and teaching. In the gospels, many images from nature are used especially in Jesus' parables. These are just a few examples:

Matthew 6:26+ 'Do not worry about your life...Look at the birds of the air... Consider the lilies of the field...'

Luke 12:6 'are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight.'

Luke 8 The stilling of the storm ...'he rebuked the wind and the raging waves, they ceased and it was calm.'

Luke 19:28-44 especially vs 40 'the stones would shout out.'

Mark 16:15 'go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole of creation.'

John 1:2 'He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him.... In him was life and that life was the light of all people. He was in the world and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. The word became flesh and lived among us...'

Some of these passages speak not only of Jesus' care for the natural world but also of his power over creation. How do you see the connection between these two aspects of Jesus' ministry and where do we, humanity, fit into this scheme of things?

In his letter to the Romans, Paul has this to say:

Rom 1: 20 'Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.'

Rom 8: 20+ 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now.... While we wait for the redemption of our bodies.... Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God'.

The second of these passages is particularly enigmatic. What do you think it means?



AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST ...

Revelation 21:1 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...and God himself will be with them... See I am making all things new...' Rev 22:1 - 2 'the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb. On either side of the river is the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations...'

Is there a link here between this passage and the creation stories right at the beginning of the Bible?

CLOSING REFLECTION & PRAYER

Psalm 65, 9 - 13

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.

You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

Prayer

Creator God, remind us to rejoice in all that is good and beautiful in your world.

Help us to value it and protect it as you call us to do.

Focus our attention on the world as you intended, where we live in harmony with the world and each other, in relationships guided by justice and peace. Give us strength to speak up for your world and to live lives that demonstrate your kingdom come.

Amen

To ponder this week:

There are many and varied ways in which the Biblical writers have thought about God's creation and humanity's responsibility to care for it. This week, read the following summary of some of these biblical themes and look up some of the Bible passages given. As you read and pray about these texts, ask God to reveal to you where you can see these themes at work in the world today, and ponder the ways in which God may be calling you, through scripture, to respond:

God's defence of the oppressed (Psalm 104 Romans 8:19-21, Eccles 3:18); Wider vision of harmony (Isaiah 11:6-7); Sabbath rest (Lev 25, Exodus 20:8-11); Covenant (Hosea 2:20, Genesis 9); Choose life, (Deut 30:19); Emmanuel - God with us (Lev 26:11-12, Job 12:24, the gospels); Human sin and arrogance needs repentance (Isa 24:4-6, Job 28:1-3).

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