



Week One (Trinity XIII)

God's gift and our flourishing

Lectionary readings

Song of Solomon 2:8 – 13

Psalms 45:1 – 8

James 1:17 – 27

Mark 7:1 – 8, 14 – 15, 21 – 22

Collect:

Almighty God, who called your Church to bear witness that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself: help us to proclaim the good news of your love, that all who hear it may be drawn to you; through him who was lifted up on the cross, and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Everything is a gift of God's love

The Song of Solomon celebrates love and creativity. There is much imagery throughout the poem from gardens and fields, animals and plants to celebrate the joy of human love. Christians understand God's world as the context for human flourishing; and for the flourishing of all God's creation. All things come to us as gift from 'the Father of lights' (James 1:17).

According to the witness of our Scriptures, everything we have - life, and the means of life, comes to us as gift. This is the ground of our worship. The beauty and harmony of God's creation is for all cultures a source of human wellbeing, spiritual nourishment and joy. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God).

Share a personal story about finding joy in creation

Lots of people find delight in God's world in a rich variety of ways: for example through sunsets, landscapes, the night sky, looking at birds, insects or flowers.



Exceeding planetary boundaries

There are many threats to the wellbeing of the planet, and the beauty and harmony of God's creation; ways in which we are exceeding '**planetary boundaries**'. Mark Lynas lists the planetary boundaries, where humanity is trying to live beyond the resources of the planet, which we have either crossed or will soon cross as the following:

Climate change; the nitrogen cycle; land use; freshwater supplies; toxic chemicals; aerosols in the atmosphere; acidification of the oceans; the ozone Layer. (M Lynas, 2011, *The God Species*, Fourth Estate). Oxfam has produced a paper on the same theme at www.oxfam.org/grow

Seek justice

The king in psalm 45 is riding out in the cause of truth, justice and righteousness. His sceptre is a symbol of power and authority, but an authority expressed in the quest for justice. The New Testament shows us Jesus as the authentic king, who blesses those who 'hunger and thirst for justice'. We are called to share his reign - fulfilling the mandate given to humanity to exercise a benevolent 'dominion' over the works of God's hands (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8).

God is just and requires justice in response from us. This justice applies to poor communities already suffering the devastating consequences of climate change, to future generations, and to all other creatures.

People in poor communities are mostly innocent of any role in causing climate change...loving our neighbour requires us to reduce our consumption of energy for the sake of Christ who suffers with those who suffer. To live simply and sustainably contributes significantly to human flourishing. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)

Examples: There are many stories from agencies such as Christian Aid or Tearfund, which illustrate how poorer communities are suffering. For example in Teartimes Summer 2012 we read that; 'Conflict and drought have led to 400,000 Somalis fleeing their homes and seeking shelter in Mogadishu. Many end up in displacement camps where conditions are often poor...More than 2.3 million Somalis – almost a third of the population – are in need of food aid.'

Often, human sin may combine with severe weather conditions to produce enormous suffering.

Listening and Doing

James 1:17-18 echoes what has been said above about the amazing creation that God has blessed us with.

God's word of truth gives us new life (James 1:18) - life which is intended to be lived as 'doers of the word' (James 1:22). We are called not merely listen to the word but to act in response to the truth. In the context of climate change, we need to know certain scientific truths. For example:

For thousands of years the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has averaged at 280 parts per million. This concentration has been going up since the Industrial Revolution and rising very quickly in the last 30 years. It is now at 390 parts per million. The CO₂ concentration affects the average temperature of the earth. If things do not change, in the next 50 years that temperature is likely to rise by more than 2 degrees, and maybe much more. The difference in temperature between the middle of an ice age and the warm period in between is about 5 – 6 degrees. So we are talking about 'half an ice age' in less than 100 years. That is very difficult for the planet to adjust to. There will be serious weather events causing massive damage to human life and to the wellbeing of other creatures. Our grandchildren will grow up into a very different world.

God's people are to live for him in obedience to his word, and with especial care for the most disadvantaged people (James 1:27).

In recent decades and with increasing urgency, climate scientists have warned of the dangers of catastrophic climate change resulting from human activity.....Climate change could result in the loss of livelihoods and sometimes life for huge numbers of people and the extinction of countless species. This matters because the wellbeing of all creation matters to God. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)

We are to live in the light of this truth.

Further questions to explore and discuss:

1. 'You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions' (Mark 7:8). What human traditions are we holding onto that hinder us in following God's commandments?
2. 'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.' (James 1:27). What sort of pollution from the world should we keep ourselves from? Do you consider that the prevailing world view - that human flourishing requires the amassing of wealth and possessions - may also be a form of pollution? If so, how can we keep ourselves from pursuing this?
3. Is climate change primarily more an issue of justice than an environmental issue? How might this affect our response as Christians?

Traditional Jewish prayer

How wonderful, O Lord, are the works of your hands! The heavens declare your glory; the arch of sky displays your handiwork. In your love you have given us the power to behold the beauty of your world robed in all its splendour.

The sun and the stars, the valleys and hills, the rivers and lakes all disclose your presence. The roaring breakers of the seas tell of your awesome might; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air speak of your wondrous will.

In your goodness you have made us able to hear the music of the world. You are in our midst. A divine voice sings through all creation.

A closing prayer

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image
And yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ:
Grant that as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the
life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.