

At Home Service for St. John's, 4 October 2020

Harvest of creation

The following service (in all its forms, this text version the video version and the version in the church building) is based on a service originally compiled by Jacqui Hyde for Roots around the seven days of the creation story.

Introduction

Creation is a mystery. Science speaks of *The Big Bang* – a bit of a misnomer as there was nothing to explode or make a noise, but it is a way of saying energy-matter and space-time came into existence. Some think they have an idea about what was going on in the first tiny fraction of a second but at the very beginning our understanding breaks down. Those who told the stories of creation recorded in the Bible realised too that creation was a great and powerful mystery. Most people would not consider these stories to be scientific or historical accounts but ways of expressing the belief that God was at work in the birth of our universe and continues today to shape, re-form, and create it.

At this time of Harvest, we think of the abundance that is in God's bountiful created order and we give thanks. We acknowledge our part in the creative process in tilling the land, in manufacture and service of others but we also acknowledge our failure's in caring for creation. Normally we would offer gifts and display them as part of our celebration. That is much curtailed this year, although I do hope you have seen in the Newsletter how you can make gifts to the work of the Salvation Army. This year we emphasise the spiritual aspect of receiving from God and giving back to God. Instead of asking people to come forward and/or already having a display you will be asked to think of God's gifts and the gift's you have to offer (and we will dedicate the gifts that have been/will be received).

This version of the service and the one in the building include two hymns which may not be familiar to you; you are invited to reflect on the words. The video version however, contains two of the very well-known harvest hymns and you might prefer to play them or find your own favourites on YouTube or elsewhere. You can of course use the sheet as you wish, but you might like to read the main text silently but read out loud the text of hymns (or even sing) and the prayers in the bold type.

We are now going to explore the mystery of creation, following the pattern of seven days as recorded in Genesis 1. We begin with the opening words of Genesis. You might like to keep a moments quiet before you begin and then to try and picture a dark expanse of water.

DAY 1 Light

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.



And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning - the first day.

Hymn (The tune set for this Hymn is Lobe Den Herren, to which Praise to the Lord the Almighty is sung, you may wish to try to sing)

1 Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,
racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation ;
sun of delight
succeeds the velvet of night,
warming the earth's exultation.

2 Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would bind us,
searing the darkness of fear and despair that could blind us,
touching our shame
with love that will not lay blame,
reaching out gently to find us.

3 Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion,
tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion ;
lifeblood of right,
resisting evil and slight,
offering freedom's transfusion.

4 Sing for God's saints who have travelled faith's journey before us,
who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us ;
in them we see
the new creation to be,
spirit of love made flesh for us.

Kathy Galloway (b. 1952) *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 116 Words: © Kathy Galloway

DAY 2 Separating the waters

And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning - the second day.

DAY 3 Plants

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth and the waters that were gathered together God called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seed of every kind and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning - the third day.



Short reflection

Were you surprised by the opening sentence? You are probably familiar with the words "In the beginning God created ...", but what we had was "In the beginning **when** God created...". There is much debate among scholars about how to translate these words. In choosing to include 'when' those who produced this translation (NRSV) are emphasising that God creates out of chaos; God brings order. (Others see this as diminishing the sense of **creation** out of nothing). As the days progress we see a transformation from darkness and chaos to form and habitation. At each stage God saw that it was good –pleasing to any and all senses and beneficial.

Our first response is to be lost in awe and wonder and praise at this light, abundant and habitable order out of darkness and chaos.

First act of Thanksgiving -Adoration

Let us pray. Creator God, we marvel at the details of your handiwork: petals and leaves and grains of sand. Perfect and accurate in microscopic beauty. We thank you and praise you for the colours of creation: pigment and shade.

The fragrance of flowers: perfumes gift-wrapped by you.

Amen



Matthew 7.15-20 (Part of the Sermon on the Mount -Jesus is speaking)

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.”

Act of confession

Lord, we are sorry for all the times we have done things we should not have done. We are sorry for all the times we have borne bad fruit. For the individual things like the lack of care for our neighbours; and the things we have done as a society, like the poor distribution of the bounty you have provided and ignoring the gifts of many; and the things we have done as a species, like the misuse of resources leading to climate change.

Please forgive us in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Please help us to be like trees that bear good fruit. When people see what we do, may they see that we are rooted in you. May we challenge all that leads to bad fruit. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

God loves us and sent his Son, Jesus Christ, through whom our sins are forgiven, so that we may have life and live it to the full. **Amen.**

DAY 4 The two great lights

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light on the earth.' And it was so.

God made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning - the fourth day.

DAY 5 Sea creatures and birds

And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So God created the great sea monsters and every living thing that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning - the fifth day.

DAY 6 Land animals

And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

A short reflection

There is a parallel between each of the former days and these. Day one: light; now day four: two lights. On day two water and sky are separated and on day four they are populated. Finally, day three saw the appearance of Land and now, on day six it is populated.

Days one to three see the basic fabric created and days four to six see it become structured in time and becoming fruitful –what we celebrate at harvest time. It is interesting to note that the two lights are not named, although their importance in giving structure to time –days months and seasons is pointed out. In many cultures that share similar myths to the Genesis stories the Moon and/or the Sun become objects of worship but not here! We may see God in the created order, in the beauty of that order, in the beauty of the structure (time and physical structure) but it is God not nature that is worshiped.

There is however another interesting point to note in the creativity of these later days. God does not say on day five and six 'Let there be creatures', rather we have, 'Let the water teem with living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' and 'Let the land produce living creatures'. Yes, the act of creations is God's but it is through a command to the waters and the ground to bring forth the life. God creates a world that shares in its own bountiful creation! This is seen particularly in verse 22, "God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and increase ...'."

Humanity is created

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning - the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude.

Further reflection

Many have seen humanity as being the pinnacle of the created order, being placed last in this version of creation. It is not unreasonable to see that in the way the story is presented and in the fact that humanity is explicitly made in the image of God. However the nature of that special place is often misunderstood. The word translated humankind (often 'man' in older translations) is 'adam' in Hebrew. This may well be related to the word 'adamah' which means earth or soil. So might humanity be 'the earth creature' (that makes a lot of sense when thought about in relation to the creation story in the second chapter of Genesis)?

We are sustained by toiling the earth. God gives dominion or stewardship over the earth to the earth creature made in the image of God. For much of our existence that has meant trying to control nature, but now surely it means much more of a shared responsibility to care for the planet as we become aware of the damage we have done. To be in the image of God surely means to share something of the nature of God being at work in creation –helping to bring forth fruitfulness not seeking to dominate.

Hymn StF 111

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| 1 Lord of the boundless curves of space
and time's deep mystery,
to your creative might we trace
all nature's energy | 3 Your Spirit gave the living cell
its hidden, vital force:
the instincts which all life impel
derive from you, their source. |
| 2 Your mind conceived the galaxy,
each atom's secret planned,
and every age of history
your purpose, Lord, has spanned. | 4 You gave a growing consciousness,
first sown when time began,
with all our longing to progress,
discover, shape and plan. |

5 In Christ the living power of grace
to liberate and lead
lights up the future of our race
with mercy's crowning deed.

6 Lead us, whom love has made and sought
to find, when planets fall,
that Omega of life and thought
where Christ is all in all.

Albert Frederick Bayly (1901-1984) and Brain Wren (b. 1936)
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Prayers: second thanksgiving and intercession

Pause for a moment. Think of the wonderful gifts of God in creation –all sorts not just the obvious harvest produce. Think what God has given you personally. Think how you can use those gifts. What are you giving back to God. What might you give/have given explicitly for the work of the Salvation Army – we dedicate those gifts now.

Let us pray.

God of all creation, thank you for the wonderful things you have made.

Thank you for the universe full of stars and planets. Thank you for our world, full of life.

Thank you for making each one of us. Thank you for loving each one of us.

Take these gifts we now offer back to you. May they be used to the glory of your name.

We offer you ourselves and all the gifts you have blessed us with. Take us and use us to share your love with the world.

Amen.

Creator God, at this harvest time as we think of your bounty in creation we pray for the whole created order. We pray for a right understanding of our stewardship. We pray for those who go hungry because the land has been misused or not shared fairly. We pray for those who campaign for a better environment for all –for better use of resources, less waste, more reuse and recycling, less wasteful energy use with less carbon and other greenhouse gases.

We pray for the life of St. John's Church. For the services produced in texted form, recorded and put on line and taking place in the building. For prayer –individually, through organised meetings and other communications. For our support for one another. For our mission and witness –may we be guided in how to meet the needs of those we reach on line or come new to us as well as continuing to meet the needs of those already known. Give wisdom to our Ministers and all who help to run the church, particularly as we prepare for our AGM.

Creator God we pray for the work of the Salvation Army and other Christian agencies (and indeed others too) seeking to bring resources to those most in need; particularly with the extra needs brought about by COVID 19 and the extra difficulties in meeting those needs.

Creator God who made us in your image to be stewards, we pray for those who have responsibility for your world, for governments (national and local), for law makers and law supervisors (police and other agencies, judiciary and lawyers etc.), for emergency services and wealth creators, for teachers, for food producers, for all workers and volunteers; particularly with the needs and difficulties of COVID 19 we pray for wisdom and humility for all and that they may refrain from domination and being judgmental, even as responsibility is not shirked.

Let us be quiet before our creating and sustaining God and bring to mind those we know in particular need –those in ill health or troubled, those bereaved or missing loved ones.

And we pray for ourselves (in the slightly surprising words of Rev. Dr. Andrew Fox, the Deputy Chair of the Shetland District of the Methodist Church from the 2020/21 Methodist Prayer Handbook day 30).

Lord of this precious earth, help each one of us by your grace to be 'non-recycling', not repeating again and again the failings of our past. May we be 'plastic', that is 'capable of being moulded and formed' according to your will through the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts and minds. And may we be 'disposable', that is 'available for use if needed'. For the sake of our world and all you love, use us as needed and be glorified in our non-recycling, plastic, disposability. **Amen.**

DAY 7 A day of rest

By the seventh day, God had finished the work; so on the seventh day God rested. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from the work he had done in creation.

God's work of creation did not stop there. The work of creation is still going on all around us. This work was fulfilled in a new way in Christ, as Paul wrote to the people in Colossae.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1.15).

Blessing

God spoke, and it was so. God looked at what was made and saw that it was good.

May the God of all creation continue to work among us, blessing us as we work for the coming of the kingdom, in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and in the power of the Spirit and to the glory of the Father.

Amen.

Dismissal

God almighty, we have seen your glory in the splendour of your creation and in the love of your Son. Now let your presence go with us (even if we physically stay where we are), and give us rest.

Amen.

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