



Sustainable Sunday

for the Season of Creation

24 September 2023

Preparation Notes

The congregation may want to include some interactive activity following the reflection.

- You could play the 'Sustainability Game' bingo and follow this with a short discussion around the challenges and effectiveness of individual household actions. (see sheet attached)
- In the weeks leading up to the service people could collect recycling items (or do a litter pick-up of such items in your town or suburb) and then gather these to produce a recycled art project. (see sheet attached)
- An energy and waste audit of your church could be carried out before the service. (see 'Simplifying Sustainability' attached) Present this to the church and then small groups could share about ways to be more energy and waste efficient.

Worship Service Outline

CALL TO WORSHIP

In Christ we set out
from what we have known

Trusting God for each step of the way

Discovering kinship in all who have breath
in feather and scale in bright eyes and song,
in cells' patterns,
in blood, flesh and bone!

Come, let us together worship the God of all.

SONG OF PRAISE

Suggestions:

- TiS 92 'Sing to God with joy and gladness'
- TiS 100 'All creatures of our God and King'
- TiS 135 'All things bright and beautiful'
- TiS 137 'For the beauty of the earth'
- TiS 149 'This is my Father's world'
- TiS 179 'Praise with joy the world's creator'
- TiS 181 'Come, O God of all the earth'



PRAYER OF APPROACH 'Through joy and hope'
Sustaining God, through joy and love and hope
In fellow creatures you look us full in the face.
You delight and challenge, nourish and threaten;
And we, your people, are called to be alert, awake,
and ready to respond.
Fulfilling our place and purpose
our service as creatures
in the tending of all that has breath:
flesh of all flesh which in Christ you chose to be.
As trees breathe out what we breathe in
so in the cycles of life which are cycles of praise
you are given glory.
Dear God and Friend, and Source of wisdom
In this season: blow your Wild Wind
where there's a need
to stir us up
Help us to let be
As also to step in
Whatever serves your will for Sky and Soil, Heaven and Earth
For you, not we are God;
AMEN

Prayer for Season of Creation, by Val Brown, Head of Christian Aid Scotland

PRAYER OF CONFESSION
God, our creator and healer,
We confess that we have sinned;
We have used creation, not cherished it;
We have lived selfishly, not watching the balance of life;
We have been greedy in not sharing earth's gifts;
And our footprints are heavy rather than gentle.

Forgive us the damage that disturbs our planet.
Grant us the grace to live for the world's healing
And our own.
Bless the seasons of the year, -
May they be restored to your order and balance.

Chris Polhill
Bare Feet and Buttercups
Wild Goose Publications, 2008

READINGS
Exodus 16: 2-15
Matthew 20: 1-16

SONG
Suggestions: TiS 674 'Inspired by love and anger'
 TiS 668 'Touch the earth lightly'
 TiS 651 'Take, take off your shoes'



REFLECTION

Sometimes it seems we would rather put up with pain and injustice than do something about it. So many in our world are prepared to live with the slavery that a broken world inflicts rather than work to substantially change that brokenness. After all, it is often too hard to change to something better, the transition may be difficult, and the 'mirage' of settling for the well-understood confines of enslavement can appear enticing.

The Hebrew people had escaped Egypt and the terrible slavery which had been inflicted upon them: arbitrary detention, enforced labour, arbitrary removal of resources. Even the terror of soldiers going through the camps killing the boy children. Yet for all that, you still knew there would be a roof over your heads and a meal in your belly. It was hard, but at least the grim routine could be relied upon.

But now – now the Hebrews were out in the wilderness and they had to take responsibilities for themselves. They had to fend for themselves, make decisions for themselves, and no longer rely upon others to tell them what to do. And it all seemed so hard and perilous and uncertain! Chasing dreams of freedom is fine, but how shall we survive and how can we make things work? “Wouldn't it be better to simply turn back to the slavery we all understood with the promise of a pot of food, even if it meant filtering out the whips and the oppression?”

A story thousands of years old, but it tells us that times of transition and change can be hard, even frightening. The temptation is always there to retreat from the vision of a new life back to the brokenness we learnt to accept. It can be the transition from dependent childhood to becoming responsible adults. It can be the uncertainty of leaving behind simplistic black and white beliefs for the uncertain, but life-giving future of walking by faith. And as a human society it can be the difficult transition to a sustainable and just future for ourselves and our planet.

For as a world we have become trapped to a mindset of endless consumption and some fantasy of uninterrupted economic growth. We have enslaved ourselves to competition, stress, mental health breakdown and suicides, of choking ourselves in plastics and choking our atmosphere in carbon dioxide. Our economies only seem to create more inequity, injustice and refugees, as we continue to strip-mine and over-fish and clear-fell the natural environment and to push our fellow creatures to extinction.

And in all this the 'fleshpot' we longingly want to hold on to, indeed the addiction we rely on is surely that of fossil fuels. Coal, oil and gas. How could we possibly leave behind such a source of cheap energy, even if it does mean killing our planet in the process?

But, all is not lost. There are visions of hope and the promise of a better future. We long for a time of sustainable energy, of less pollution or the use of plastics, and a responsible care of the environment where we no longer exploit and destroy. And we long for a society where all have a home and enough food to eat, and where each can live in peace and unafraid. Yet the transition to such a future seems so difficult and unclear.



This time of change is like travelling through a wilderness of uncertainty with huge obstacles in our way, and in truth that is frightening! Much better to go back to the fantasy of our gas-guzzling cars, big T-bones on the barbie, when we all used plastic shopping bags and had never heard of climate change.

You know, when those Hebrews faced the uncertainty of the wilderness and wanted to go back, God enabled a way forward. The future was not handed to them on a plate, for sure. They still had to journey towards that themselves. But God sustained them in the wilderness and gave them food for the journey. The future vision of a 'land flowing with milk and honey' was still out of view. The promise was more for their children than for themselves, and the rations of mana and quails may have seemed a bit boring. Yet they were enabled to keep moving forward. This was no time to give in to nostalgia, or a return to some fantasy of the past.

We too journey in a time of great change and uncertainty. For us also the promised reality is still beyond reach and perhaps more a hope for our children and grandchildren than for ourselves. And we too face obstacles and uncertainties in our path.

- Will we have enough energy and can we maintain base-load in our power grid if we stop coal mining?
- Will our economy be strong enough without fossil fuels?
- How will we manage without so much plastic packaging?
- Will there be enough food if we reduced trawling in the world's oceans or clearing the bush for agriculture?
- And how do we possibly create a fairer society when faced with the interests of big corporations, political unwillingness for change and media bias?

The obstacles are clear and the path ahead is uncertain, yet now is not the time to give in, and it is certainly not the time to return to some past fantasy. Rather, God gives us the strength and resources to work towards a more sustainable and life-giving future. There are good people in our world, motivated in hope, compassion and the courage to make a difference. There is ingenuity and inventiveness creating new options for the future. And most importantly, there is enough food and energy and resources for all, but only if we share what we have and do not give in to our greed or our fears.

We finish with thoughts from the Gospel reading and the very counter-cultural parable Jesus told. He tells the story of a landowner who employs some people for the whole day, some for half a day and some for only an hour, but then pays them each the same amount: a day's wages. And at first this seems to us very unfair and unjust. Surely the one who has worked the hardest should get the most. Yet Jesus turns this conventional thinking on its head and tells us that true justice is to be found not in people getting what they think they deserve, but rather, the justice of God's Kingdom is found in each person getting enough for what they **need**.

The conventional thinking of our Western world is that we should be motivated by competition, envy and even greed. If I am able and work hard enough (and am fortunate enough) then I should receive more than someone else. And I can aspire even to become a billionaire like a Gina Rinehart or an Elon Musk.



The values of God's Kingdom however, run opposite to this. God promises enough for all and ultimately our motivation is more relational than competitive. Our motivation within God's Kingdom is that of community and the concern for my brother and sister, which includes the earth and all its creatures. Just because I live in a developed country, for instance, and can use technology to create more wealth does not mean I deserve more than a farmer in Zimbabwe or a fisher woman in Kiribati. Just because I have the capital and technology to dam the Murray River for my multi-million dollar cotton plantation does not mean I have the right to do so over and above the needs of others downstream or the needs of the natural environment. And even if I have worked long and hard it does not justify a life of luxury and comfort while my brother or sister should be homeless or without food.

The values of God's Kingdom directly challenge the prevailing myth of our Western Capitalism which would claim that the lucky few deserve more than the many, regardless of the needs of each one. It also challenges the notion that we can continue to pillage the earth for what we think we humans deserve over and above the needs of our fellow creatures and sky and oceans.

On a global scale we face a difficult transition to a more sustainable and life-giving future. Yet the Spirit of God reassures us that this journey through the wilderness will be possible and it will be worthwhile. And yes, there are frightening obstacles in our path: climate change, technological challenges, pollution, economic uncertainties and more. But arguably the greatest challenge is from ourselves: you and me. The greatest challenge is that we in our humanity must change our mindset to align more to that of the God's Kingdom. It is only as we learn to live with what we need rather than feeding our individual greeds that we will have enough. And it will only be as we live for the good of all rather than our individual wants that we will survive this journey, and together come to the promised land of the Kingdom of God.

Rev Gordon Scantlebury

INTERACTIVE SUSTAINABILITY ACTIVITY

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God of all people, of all creatures;
We thank you for the world that you have created,
Where each ecosystem lives in delicate balance
And where the world produces the food and the clean water
that we all need to sustain life.
The bounty of the harvest is a testament to the wonder of creation.
And yet we know that all creation is groaning
The weather isn't what it was and that throws out the created balance
Making it harder for farmers to grow the food we all need.
Thank you for the efforts of people locally, nationally and globally to care for
your world
For the people who use their creative energy to work for solutions,
For the people who raise their voices to call for justice,
For the people who make small changes every day to tread more lightly on the
earth.



May we all learn to live simply, so that others can simply live.

Amen

Prayer for Season of Creation, by Val Brown, Head of Christian Aid Scotland

LITANY FOR HOPE AND BLESSING

God, bless all who know the value of the land
and who have the courage to put themselves on the line.

God, bless them.

God, bless the indigenous peoples of our world
who stand up for their land and culture and spirituality.

God, bless them.

God, bless the indigenous and other Australians
speaking out against widespread gas fracking in the Kimberly's
and Northern Territory.

God, bless them.

God, bless the artists, film-makers, presenters and others who use their talents and
vision to move people to wonder and action.

We give thanks for people internationally like Sir David Attenborough
who has shown us some of the wonders of the living world,
and locally, presenters like Craig Reucassel in the 'War on Waste', who has
modelled local concern and action.

God, bless them.

God, bless people working in organisations like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth,
the World Wildlife Fund and others who campaign for a healthier world.

Bless too the work of the Climate Council
and the voice of ARRCC - the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change.

God, bless them.

God, bless those politicians and leaders
who are prepared to make decisions that value the earth and its creatures
above profits and the power of corporations.

God, bless them.

God, bless each one of us in our efforts to recycle more and consume less.

Bless us as we work for change
and follow courageously in the footsteps of Jesus, Our Lord.

Bless us and all the world, we pray.

Amen

SONG

Suggestions: TiS 690 'Beauty for brokenness'
 TiS 687 'God gives us a future'
 TiS 672 'Lord of earth and all creation'



SENDING OUT AND BLESSING

In you may every family
of all the Earth be blessed.
In you each ecosystem
and habitat be blessed.
In you, by faith be wildlife
and wilderness be blessed.
And you, through Christ, shine brightly
That all the earth be blessed.

Go in peace now to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

