

Elegy – George Thalben-Ball

(4:15) Thoughts for the third Sunday after Easter also known as the fourth Sunday of Easter

The lectionary readings from the Authorized version of the bible are those specified in the Common Worship lectionary and the Collect is from the Book of Common Prayer

(4:34) The Collect

Almighty God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness: Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(5:03) Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.
- 3 He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.
- 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.
- 5 Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me: thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.
- 6 Surely thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

(5:57) The old testament reading is the seventh chapter of the book of Genesis:

- 1 And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.
- 2 Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female.
- 3 Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

- 4 For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.
- 5 And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him.
- 6 And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.
- 7 And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood.
- 8 Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth,
- 9 There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.
- 10 And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.
- 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.
- 12 And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.
- 13 In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark;
- 14 They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.
- 15 And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life.
- 16 And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the Lord shut him in.
- 17 And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth.
- 18 And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters.
- 19 And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered.

- 20 Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.
- 21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man:
- 22 All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.
- 23 And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.
- 24 And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.

(9:45) A reading from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles beginning at the forty-second verse:

- 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.
- 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.
- 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;
- 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.
- 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,
- 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

(10:37) The Epistle is written in the second chapter of the first letter of Peter beginning at the nineteenth verse:

- 19 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.
- 20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.
- 21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

- 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:
- 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:
- 24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.
- 25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

(11:55) The Gospel reading is written in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John beginning at the first verse:

- 1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.
- 2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
- 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.
- 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.
- 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.
- 6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.
- 7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.
- 8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.
- 9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.
- 10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

(13:30) A 'Thought for the Week' from Caroline Pomeroy, Director of Climate Stewards and Environmental Advisor, Diocese of Bath and Wells who was due to be speaking at a service in Beckington this week. These thoughts address her concerns more than the themes in this week's readings.

I hardly need to tell you that we are living in strange times. While acknowledging the negative impacts of lockdown, this period also means that most of us are travelling less, shopping less and wasting less, and have more time to appreciate the beauty and diversity of the natural world around us. With little traffic noise, clear skies and glorious sunshine, we're aware of birdsong, butterflies and wildflowers more than ever before.

We may also be listening to national and international conversations about what the 'new normal' could look like, focusing on sustainable growth, more aware of the fragility our current economic systems and the interdependence of humankind and the natural world on which we rely. Journalist Geoffrey Lean wrote recently, "The economy, as Covid-19 has made painfully clear, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, dependent on healthy systems." (Daily Mail, 7 April 2020).

But do we as Christians have anything to contribute to this conversation? What does our faith say about caring for creation?

The first chapters of Genesis tell us that God made the universe, and creation is intrinsically good. Genesis 2:7 tells us that we are made out of the dust of the earth; 'Adamah' means dust. So we are earthlings, part of creation. But we are also set apart. God places Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden to work and take care of it (Genesis 2:15). God has delegated responsibility to us to steward the earth out of love and obedience to Him. Christian 'dominion' (not domination!) is to be exercised by serving creation on God's behalf – being good stewards on behalf of the landlord, God. This means ensuring that every part of creation is able to flourish.

Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 8:18-27) tells us that creation is groaning; the triangle of relationships between God, humankind and the earth has been broken as we have inflicted harm not only one another, but on the earth itself. Geologists call this the Anthropocene – a new geological era when for the first time ever, human activity (burning fossil fuels) is the main factor driving our climate, sea levels, rainfall and drought, hurricanes and other extreme weather events. As teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg puts it, 'Our house is on fire.' Meanwhile we are losing our biodiversity at unprecedented rates, choking the seas with plastic, and polluting our cities – the list goes on...

In Colossians 1:15-20, Paul describes how Jesus is the source of creation, the sustainer of creation, and the saviour of creation, reconciling all things to himself through the cross. Jesus brings reconciliation not just between God and humans, but with the whole of creation.

So what does this mean for us as individuals and churches today?

First, let's make the most of this period of lockdown to slow down, notice, enjoy and give thanks to God for His creation. Sit, walk, pray, take photos, sketch. It's been said that God speaks to us through two books – His book of words, the bible; and His book of works, creation. Let's listen to them both.

Secondly, consider our own lifestyles and how we can tread more lightly on the earth. There are thousands of websites full of ideas – try 52 Climate Actions or Climate Stewards.

Thirdly, find out more about Eco Church. This is an award scheme designed to help churches think through how their teaching and practice reflects God's love for creation, and then to take action. St George's (Beckington) has registered on the scheme, which encourages us to look at worship and teaching, management of church buildings and land, engagement with the wider community, and lifestyle. It's a great framework to help us put into practice the Anglican church's fifth 'Mark of Mission' – 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'

(18:42) Prelude in E BWV566 – J S Bach