

St Martin's College Chaplaincy
"Stewards of Creation" Communion Service

I planned this "Stewards of Creation" service at the invitation of the Chaplaincy Team of St Martin's College, Lancaster. It was planned as one of the College's Lancaster Chapel's weekly Wednesday "Chapel Hour" services. It took place at 12 noon on Wednesday 30th January 2002.

The service comprises of a mixture of my own original written work interspersed with materials reproduced or adapted from other sources, notably materials published or distributed by the John Ray Initiative and A Rocha – Christian environmental charities. The sources of all such materials are acknowledged in the reference section at the end of this document.

Adrian Thompson

Hymn 1: Shout to the Lord, All the Earth, Let it sing

Reading 1: Colossians 1, 15-17

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹

Talk 1: Jesus Christ, Lord and Sustainer of the Community of Creation

As we have just heard, Jesus – the image of the invisible God – created all things - 'things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (Colossians 1, 15-17). In Hebrews, Chapter 1, Jesus is described as follows: The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, *sustaining all things by his powerful word*.

So God's Son not only created all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, but also – throughout all time, up to the present day - sustains their existence by His Word.

This is a communion service. Here, worshipping together in communion, we can begin to understand the nature of the original communion that existed at the start of time – God with all his created beings, seen and unseen – the community of heavenly beings, people, nature and the earth, all praising their Creator².

Using words from Psalm 148, let us now join with the rest of creation, visible and invisible, in worshipping Jesus Christ our Creator and Lord, as we proclaim:

Response 1: Psalm 148

LEADER:

1Praise the LORD.

**Praise the LORD from the heavens,
praise him in the heights above.**

CONGREGATION: **2**Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

LEADER: **3**Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars.

CONGREGATION: **4**Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

LEADER: **5**Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.

CONGREGATION: **6**He set them in place for ever and ever;
he gave a decree that will never pass away.

LEADER: **7**Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

CONGREGATION: **8**lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,

LEADER: **9**you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

CONGREGATION: **10**wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,

LEADER: **11**kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,

CONGREGATION: **12**young men and maidens,
old men and children.

LEADER: **13**Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
14He has raised up for his people a horn,
the praise of all his saints,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

CONGREGATION: Praise the LORD!^{1 & 3}

Talk 2: God’s Intended Relationship with the Whole of His Creation

Loving intimacy was a feature of all the relationships that existed within this original community of all creation. Throughout this service, when reference is made to the relationships that existed in the Garden of Eden, these will be referred to as the “Eden Relationships”. There were several types of “Eden Relationship”, namely the relationships that existed between:

God and the heavenly hosts
God and man
Between people – Adam and Eve
Between God, people and all creation.

As an example, let us consider the original relationship between God and man. Genesis, chapter 3, verse 8 says the following: Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

God is walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden He has planted. This description suggests an intimate relationship maintained by His sustaining presence. He put Adam in the Garden 'to work it and take care of it' (Genesis 2:15), but in His intimate presence, with the help of His sustaining power. So we, together with all the other creatures of creation, were each created to exist in an intimate relationship with Him - our loving Lord and Creator. We were not designed to be independent, to be able to operate in isolation, solely on the basis of our own resources, isolated from the God's strength, wisdom, power and love. Prior to the Fall, God's loving presence bound together the whole of creation in community².

Let us continue to join with the rest of His creation in worship, by singing:

Hymn 2: O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder

Talk 3: The Fall –Part 1

We have seen how creation initially experienced the intimate presence of God. We know that this is not the situation today. So what went wrong? Rebellion started in the heavens:

Reading 2: Isaiah 14: 12-15

'How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!' You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit.¹

Talk 3: The Fall –Part 2

Lucifer – The Angel of Light, created to love and worship God chose to turn away and pursue the self-centred ambition of becoming God-like himself. Once in rebellion, God threw Lucifer, the Devil, from the Heavens to prowl about on earth.

With Lucifer cast down to the earthly realms, the rebellion of God's created beings soon spread to the Garden of Eden.

In the following reading from Genesis, we hear of the effect of evil on:

- God's relationship with human beings – both Adam and Eve hide in fear of God and are then cast out of His Garden;
- the relationship of human beings with each other – Adam blames Eve for having eaten the apple;
- the relationship of human beings with the rest of creation – from now on only through 'painful toil' will the earth provide for them. Since this time man's interactions with the physical world have so often caused erosion, pollution and the destruction of ecosystems.

Sin blocks out God's sustaining presence – in His absence - all relationships between His created beings *twist, fracture and warp*.

Reading 3: Genesis 3, 1-13 and 17-23

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate..."

...And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" - therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.¹

Talk 3 - The Fall –Part 3

As God, with his Holy nature, recoils from the presence and seriousness of sin, God's intended intimacy, His walking in the Garden with **all** of creation is brought to an end in the face of sin. A rift, both spiritual and physical in nature, appears between God and his Fallen creation. All the "*Eden relationships*" are ripped, torn, severed and maimed.

We are all fully aware of the consequences of sin in the world and our part in the continued disruption of God's intentions for His creation. So let's now join together, not only to acknowledge with thanks the role of "stewards of creation" that God has given us, but also to confess our great failures in fulfilling this role².

Response 2: Praise and confession

LEADER: The Lord formed the man from the dust of the ground.

ALL: Thank you Lord God that you made humankind from the earth, to belong to it, our future bound up with its future.

LEADER: The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

ALL: Thank you God for the freedom and responsibility you have given us to take care of the earth.

LEADER: To the man God said...'Cursed is the ground because of you'.

ALL: We confess that we have so often failed in our responsibility and mistreated the world, the land, sea and sky, living creatures and our human neighbours. We acknowledge that in failing to maintain right relationships with all parts of your created order, we have also failed in our relationship with you, with each other and in our role as stewards of your creation – we have marred your image in us. Father forgive us.

LEADER: THE ABSOLUTION:

**May God who loved His creation so much
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins
and make us holy to serve him in the world
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.**

The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

ALL: Thank you God that through your Son Jesus Christ, His death for us, and His resurrection to new life, humanity has been set free, and the whole creation will be redeemed⁴.

Let us now call for the re-uniting of the kingdoms of earth and heaven in saying the Lord's Prayer:

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen.**

TALK 4: Hope for a Fallen Creation – Part 1

So sin has separated us from the presence of God but, as we have just acknowledged in our responses, despite the rebellion and Fall of creation, God's *love* remained. In the sacrifice of his Son; in the breaking of the body of the Son of God, *hope* for the whole of creation is restored. Christ's death and resurrection heralded the start of the restoration of God's intimate relationship with His whole creation. The risen Christ opens the way for people to receive His Holy Spirit and so re-gain the intimacy of their relationship with their Creator. In receiving His Spirit people become the First Fruits of the New Heaven and the New Earth -which as we can read in 2 Peter, Chapter 3 - is promised by God, and in which His intimacy with all parts of His creation will be restored. As the Apostle Paul explains in Romans 8:

Reading 4: Romans 8:18-23

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

TALK 4: Hope for a Fallen Creation – Part 2

God loved us so much as to die, not only for our redemption, but also for the redemption of the whole of creation. In that most famous of verses, John 3:16 the Greek word used for world is "cosmos"- meaning the whole of the Universe.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him¹.

God gave his Son for the redemption of the whole of creation.

But, today, we are still waiting for Christ's return. The forces of evil still pollute our world. We cannot resist them alone, we must draw on God's strength. It is only because of the 'reality' of Calvary that we can cross the void formed by sin, re-gaining the intended "*Eden relationships*" - with God and the rest of creation – and thus restoring the Christ-centred communities to which all God's creatures belong. It is only within such communities that we shall be able to fully realise our potential as stewards of creation².

So let us prepare to receive Christ as we break and receive bread and drink wine together.

The Peace

Leader: Through Jesus Christ, God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood on the cross.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All: And also with you³.

Choir Anthem

(Suggested anthem: For the beauty of the earth - John Rutter)

Eucharistic Prayer

(Eucharistic Prayer F: Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England)

Communion Meditation

The breaking of the bread screams about the fracturing of the "*Eden Relationships*". As the bread is torn in two it reminds us of the way in which the destructive powers of sin tore us and all creation from the intimate presence of God.

The ripping bread speaks of a torn creation. The outpoured wine speaks of wounded relationships. But, both the torn bread and outpoured wine also shout of reconcillation and the restoration of the community of all creation to Christ.

The breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine speak of a *real* body, *really* broken, torn, maimed and killed, and *real* blood shed, in a *real* place in a *real* time.

**The ultimate sacrifice.
The ultimate love.
The perfect love.**

And here the healing begins.

Because of the total breaking of God himself in Jesus and His consequent Resurrection, *real* healing burst into a desperate world.

This is Christ's invitation to all people. Through the *real* breaking of his body and the *real* shedding of His blood, the *real* transference of our sins, His *real* death and resurrection and His *real* forgiveness, he invites us to restore our relationships with Him, with the heavenly hosts, with one another, with all earthly creatures and with His physical world. Christ is calling all of His creation to a restored relationship with Him.

He is calling *real* people, in *real* communities to seek *real* relationships with Him and, in so doing, to build 'Christ-centred' communities, worshipping Him, caring for each other and for the world that He has created.

So come now to receive, come now to be blessed, come now into the *reality* of His presence, forgiveness and saving grace².

Communion Hymn (Hymn 3): Broken for me

Talk 5: How Shall We Respond to God's Call to Care for Creation? – Part 1

In striving to build Christ-centred community we must remember that God honours our *partial success*. Sin still pollutes our world, so despite our efforts, we will often fall short. But as with all responsibilities and activities to which a Christian is called, when we fall short, we have the hope of the cross and forgiveness.

So, what do we gain from placing the responsibility of environmental stewardship in a Christian context?

Christians should see environmental stewardship as being one responsibility integrated into the web of responsibilities that collectively form the mission activities involved in restoring Christ-centred community. In the light of the cross, all our efforts as stewards of creation can be made with confidence, in the sure knowledge that Christ is with us not only as guide but also as Saviour when we fall short of his call. He will restore us and give us the strength to take the next step!

If we can only manage to car share or to take the bus one day a week; if we move towards recycling more, but not yet all of our waste; if institutions and industries at least start to introduce more sustainable practices; if some precious ecosystem habitats are conserved, all such efforts are examples of the 'partial success' that is honoured by God. God honours and equips us for each step. We should hold onto the vision of full

restoration of an all-creation community with God at the heart, but not let the daunting nature of the size of the task stop us from moving, with God, towards our goal, one step at a time. Consider this illustration of the point:

Meditation 2: Starfish

A man found a beach covered with dead or dying Starfish that had been washed ashore. By the water's edge he saw a boy throwing some of them into the sea.

“Why are you throwing them back?” asked the man. “There are thousands of starfish here. What you are doing isn't going to make much difference.”

The boy picked up a starfish. “It makes a difference to this one!” he said and threw it into the sea³.

Talk 5: How Shall We Respond to God's Call to Care for Creation? – Part 2

We have heard that God promises us a New Heaven and a New Earth. So why conserve our current world?

Quite simply, God has command us to rule (have dominion) over it on His behalf. But what type of sovereignty is expected? The ideal monarch of Old Testament times is the *shepherd king*, not only exercising authority over his subjects but also totally responsible for their welfare. Jesus has given us the ultimate model of Godly kingship – that of the servant king. So in our ‘dominion’ over the earth, we are called to love, care for and serve all ‘creatures and features’ of creation.

The disruption of the “*Eden Relationships*” was against God's will, not only at the beginning of time but onwards through all time. God, through Christ, still calls out to us to respond to His love.

It is ultimately God himself who restores His relationship with every individual who asks for forgiveness. However, Christ commissioned us to be involved in God's plan to restore the world to Himself, by spreading the Good News and sharing His love in the world. This is a privilege which both God and we find edifying. God could do this work Himself – he has the power and authority to do so, but he chooses to involve us in this ongoing work of restoring the “*Eden Relationships*” – people to God, people to people, human-beings to creation, all creation to Himself. God's commissioning to us to tend and care for - to be stewards of - His creation is still as relevant today as it was when God walked with Adam in the Garden. Jesus calls us to be involved in encouraging the whole of creation to respond to His love in worship. Lets each of us respond to Him now as we offer a song of worship to the servant king.²

Hymn 4: This is our God, the Servant King

Concluding prayer

**Almighty God,
You have given us so much.
You have given us your creation.
And we misused it.
You gave us your only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the world.
And we crucified him.
You gave us your holy Spirit, to guide us in our lives.
You have given us so much.
In grateful thanks we now give ourselves to you.
Take us as we are.
Transform us by your Spirit.
And use us for your service.
Now and always. Amen³**

Notices Information and leaflets provided on environmental charities and organisations including Christian environmental charities, such as the John Ray Initiative and A Rocha.

Hymn 5: The John Ray Initiative Hymn: ‘The God who set the stars in space’

(To “KINGSFOLD” – I heard the voice of Jesus say)

**The God who set the stars in space, and gave the planets birth,
Created for our dwelling place, a green and fruitful earth;
A world with wealth and beauty crowned; of sky and sea and land,
Where life should flourish and abound, beneath its Maker’s hand.**

**A world of order and delight, God gave for us to tend,
To hold as precious in his sight, to nurture and defend;
But yet on ocean, earth and air, the marks of sin are seen,
With all that God created fair, polluted and unclean.**

**O God, by whose redeeming grace, the lost may be restored,
Who stooped to save our fallen race, in Christ, creation’s Lord,
Through him whose cross is life and peace, to cleanse a heart defiled,
May human greed and conflict cease and all be reconciled.**

**Renew the wastes of earth again, Redeem, restore, repair;
With us, your children, still maintain, your covenant of care.
We may, who move from dust to dust, and on your grace depend,
No longer, Lord, betray our trust, but prove creation’s friend.**

**Our God, who sets the stars in space, and gave the planets birth,
Look down from heaven, your dwelling place, and heal the wounds of earth;
Till pain, decay and bondage done, when death itself has died,
creation’s songs shall rise as one, and God be glorified!⁵**

Dismissal

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation³.
(Mark 16:15 NRSV)

(Timothy Dudley-Smith)

¹ The Bible: Revised Standard Version (New International Version used in some places).

² All 'Talks' and the 'Communion Meditation' by Adrian Thompson, Planning and Management Information Officer, Planning and Management Information Office, St Martin's College, Lancaster, LA1 3JD and Deputy Warden of St Paul's Church, Caton Green Road, Caton with Littledale.

³ Reproduced (with minor changes to some materials) from material included in the A Rocha 2001 resource pack 'Let all creation praise the Lord' for use on Conservation Sunday – 3 June 2001.

⁴ The 'Responses' – reproduced with some additions and adaptation - which formed part of the John Ray Initiative Service of Commissioning held in the Chapel of Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education on 15 May 2001. The responses included in this document contain an absolution adapted from an absolution included on p.51, "Patterns of Worship" (1995): Church House Publishing, London.

⁵ Berry, R.J, Ed. (2000): The care of creation: Focusing concern and action, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England. p. 184-185.

Other acknowledgements of sources from which some of the concepts included in this service were derived:

Elsdon, R (1992): Greenhouse Theology, Monarch, Tunbridge Wells, England.

Houghton, J (1995): The Search for God. Can Science Help? Lion Publishing plc, Oxford, England.

Hymns 1-4: References:

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