DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR CREATIONTIDE

WEEK ONE: CREATOR

RICH CLARKSON

Come follow Christ in the footsteps of St Chad
In the name of God the Father

All: **Who made Heaven and earth**

In the name of God the Son

All: **Who became a creature like us**

In the name of God the Holy Spirit

All: **Who sustains all life on earth**

In the name of God

All: **Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

*The day’s reflection is read, followed by a time of silence*

In the world around us, this day we pray

All: **Your kingdom come**

In the world before us, this day we pray

All: **Your kingdom come**

In the world beside us, this day we pray

All: **Your kingdom come**

In the world within us, this day we pray

All: **Your kingdom come**

*The Lord’s Prayer may be said*

*Silence is kept*

God of wonder, go with us into this new day
Speak to us, refresh us, astound us,
that we may grow to love you,
and your world, more deeply.

All: **Amen.**
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

The famous opening words of the Bible, the Old Testament, the Torah, set the scene for all that is to come: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. All that was, all that is, all that will be, all this comes from God. Right from the off the Bible speaks of a God who is not passive or distant, but active and involved. The opening chapter goes on to describe the scale, the diversity, the goodness of God’s creation, but here it is enough to simply reflect on the one who creates.

Basil of Caesarea—the first of many such figures we shall meet over the coming weeks—was a Bishop in the fourth century in what is now Turkey. In one of his sermons he compared God the creator to a potter who, after painstakingly crafting a series of beautiful pots, ‘has not exhausted either his art or his talent’. The creation of the world was not a one time burst of energy that left God exhausted, rather it was a pouring out of something deep within God—a desire to create, to bring about beauty and order and all that is good. God created because God is creative and God’s creativity does not run dry.

This creative heart has left its fingerprints throughout the creation: in the wild evolution of nature, in the instinctive desire of our earliest ancestors to make art on the walls of their caves, in the stories that we tell to our children. The world is filled with creativity because it was created by a creative God whose art and talent are inexhaustible. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth—and that was only the beginning!

What signs of God’s creativity can you see around you, or within you today?
The protesters were getting agitated by this point. They were frustrated by the impassive faces before them and wanted to see something, some acknowledgement of their pain, some understanding of their plight, but they were met with blank stares. It’s unclear who threw the first bottle but it certainly got a response and soon a second, and then a third bottle flew through the air. Just as it looked like the situation was about to unravel, a voice pierced the air. An elderly woman near the front of the crowd was singing with a power that belied her slight stature. ‘We shall live in peace,’ she sang, ‘we shall overcome’. Her voice carried far across the square, prompting others to join in, and her words of peace restored peace to that volatile gathering.

In the right circumstances, with the right authority, a breath can be a powerful thing. It can calm a troubled crowd, summon a sleeping parent, convey the deepest grief, give a world-changing order, restore a loved one to life. A breath can be a powerful thing.

In the Bible the breath of God is rightly spoken of with the utmost respect. It is the breath of God which creates the starry host (Ps 33:6), gives life to Adam (Gen 2:7), brings forth ice (Job 37:10) and fire (Job 41:21), and fills the disciples with the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22). The breath of God is a powerful, creative force. God didn’t need tools to create the universe, God simply spoke—or perhaps, as C.S. Lewis so memorably described in The Magician’s Nephew, sang—the world into being. By the breath of God’s mouth, creation began.

Pay attention to the creative power of your breath today, let this remind you of the breath of God.
Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.

Generated 1:3

The early Celtic Christians knew the significance of that first command, ‘let there be light’. J. Philip Newell, in his introduction to Celtic Spirituality, explains that for the Celts there was a distinct difference between the light of the first day of creation, and the light of the fourth day of creation. The light of the fourth day—the sun, moon and stars—is a visible light. The light of the first day, however, is the light of being, from which ‘inaccessible light of God all life comes forth’. Without this light, nothing could exist. This echoes the opening of John’s gospel, ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.’

Thinking about light in this way can help us to think about God. If you shine a torch across a dark room you cannot see the beam unless it has something to reflect off—a speck of dust perhaps, or a far wall. The light reveals and illuminates all that it sees, yet it is still somehow mysterious. That same sense of mystery and wonder is felt when watching the sun set. However much we may understand the physics of atmospheric diffraction and spectral dispersion, to see the sky slowly light up in a magnificent colour display is guaranteed to invoke a profound feeling of awe.

For the Celts, light was not a symbol of release from what would otherwise be dark, rather, as Newell puts it, ‘redemption is about light being liberated from the heart of creation and from the essence of who we are.’ With those first words of creation God filled the whole creation with the light of life, and that same light illuminates all life to this day.

Try to notice the light around you as you go about your day today.
Let it draw you into the presence of the God of light.
In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible... all things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:16

Maximus the Confessor—another figure who will return as we journey through this season together—was, as a young man in the early seventh century, rising fast through the ranks of Constantinople’s high society. However he renounced this life to become a monk, first in what is now Turkey, and later in North Africa where he became a prolific writer.

Maximus wrote about how the universe was created out of nothing by God. And if the universe was created out of nothing by God, he said, then everything that exists somehow comes from God. And if everything that exists somehow comes from God then everything contains some imprint, some essence, of the creator’s intention within it.

This means that the amazing diversity of creation tells us something profound about the power and imagination of the creator. It also means that as we pay attention to the world around us we can begin to see God’s fingerprints in all that has been made.

A constantly flowing stream reminds us of God’s unfailing mercy. The rugged bark of an exposed tree speaks of God’s protection. A mother bird sheltering and providing for her chicks is an image of God’s care. A night sky full of stars reveals the overwhelming magnitude of God. On their own each of these only says a little about God, but together they build up a picture of the creator.

What signs of God’s fingerprints can you see around you today?
The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.

Psalm 24:1

One of the most commonly requested hymns at weddings and funerals is ‘All things Bright and Beautiful’. Most clergy and organists I know have to suppress an inner sigh when they hear this old favourite suggested. For those who are involved in these services regularly it may feel overused, however I think the reason it is so popular is because it does resonate with people’s understanding of God, and the world.

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.

It’s a profoundly simple encapsulation of the essence of biblical creation theology—God made it all. Of course the hymn only focusses on the bright and the beautiful, so we must thank Monty Python for suggesting some additional verses to balance it out:

All things dull and ugly, All creatures short and squat, All things rude and nasty, The Lord God made the lot.

It’s easy to think of God as the creator of a beautiful flower, a starlit night, or a crashing waterfall, but God is the creator of all creation—the good, the bad and the ugly. In the coming weeks we will look at some of the ways in which the beauty and integrity of creation has been damaged by human action. Our starting point, however, must be that all life is good, be it meerkat or mosquito, wisteria or wasp, bluebell or bindweed. All life has value because all life comes from God. Bright and beautiful or dull and ugly—the Lord God made them all.

Notice the ‘dull and ugly’ parts of God’s creation today—can you find beauty in them?
The Creator of the heavens...who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it.

Isaiah 42:5

Around 400 million years ago life on earth was concentrated almost entirely in the oceans as the atmosphere was unbreatheable. Scientist have recently shown that the organism responsible for filling this toxic environment with clean, freshly oxygenated air was, as the Guardian Newspaper put it, the ‘humble moss’. Without the carpet of moss that gradually covered the continents and oxygenated the atmosphere, life would have remained in the ocean and nothing that we know would have been possible.

This is a beautiful example of what has often been described as God ‘making the world to make itself’. The creative power with which God has filled creation means that it is constantly changing and developing, enabling life to flourish where none seemed possible.

Praise God for humble moss, without whom we, Who live and breathe and leap and laugh and praise, Could no more do such things. Praise God for days Long past when mosses spread from sea to sea A continental carpet breathing fresh New life into the oxygen starved air. Praise God for lungs which found that they could bear To breathe this atmosphere. Praise God for flesh Which crept and crawled and leapt and breathed and moved Among the lichens, liverworts and ferns. Praise God for life’s tenacity across The ages as it gradually improved, Evolved, developed hopes, dreams and concerns. For all of this, praise God for humble moss.

Rich Clarkson, 2017

What signs of life flourishing in unlikely ways can you see today?
We have lots of art on the walls of our house, some of which we bought, some we were given, and some we made ourselves. I am no artist myself—I prefer to be creative with words or music or food—but I love having it around. My favourite pieces of art are the ones that have a story, like the brightly coloured canvas in the lounge which my wife painted, and on which if you look closely you can make out a toddler’s footprint from where one of the boys walked across it. Or the harbour scene above the sofa which we bought in memory of a relative. Or the owl’s eye in the play room which our oldest son painted for his homework and which won a prize in the local village show. These are more than simply pretty pictures, they tell a story, they are part of our family history and so we treasure them.

Norman Wirzba, in his book “From Nature to Creation”, tells us that ‘The way we name and narrate the world determines how we are going to live within it’. He goes on to say that by naming the world as Creation, and particularly as good Creation, we are not only defining what the world is, but also how we live within it—we are making it part of our story, or perhaps it’s better to say that we are making ourselves part of its story.

To call the world ‘good’ means that we value it, cherish it, care for it. To call the world ‘creation’ means that we respect it, treasure it, look after it. The earth is not simply a resource with which we can do as we please, it is a work of art created by a master craftsman, it is a good creation and we have the blessing of sharing in it.

Try consciously naming the world as God’s good creation today.
How does that change your attitude towards it?
Rev. Rich Clarkson is Rector of five rural parishes in North Shropshire. He has degrees in Physics and Theology and recently completed his Master’s dissertation on Nature Contemplation in the writing of Maximus the Confessor. He is a member of the Lichfield Diocese Environmental Group, an associate of the John Ray Initiative – and dad to three wild boys!