

29th January 2023 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

The theme of this service has been inspired by resources issued by the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District to be used on District Eco Sunday, which can be marked on 29 January or some other occasion.

Call to Worship - Psalm 19:1, 14

The heavens tell out the glory of God, heaven's vault makes known his handiwork. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my mind be acceptable to you, my rock and my redeemer!

StF 1 – All people that on earth do dwell

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| 1) All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
Come ye before him and rejoice. | 4) For why, the Lord Our God is good;
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure. |
| 2) The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
Without our aid he did us make:
We are his folk, he doth us feed;
And for his sheep he doth us take. | 5) To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
The God whom heaven and earth adore,
From earth and from the angel host
Be praise and glory evermore. |
| 3) O enter then his gates with praise;
Approach with joy his courts unto;
Praise, laud, and bless his name always,
For it is seemly so to do. | |

William Kethe

Prayer of Adoration & Confession

O Lord our God, you are very great. You spoke and the universe came into being. You made stars and planets and galaxies and clusters of galaxies. You created the planet Earth to be inhabited and filled it with life. You formed human beings in your own image and breathed life into them. You made them so that you could delight in them and they in you. Throughout history all of your works are perfect and we give you the praise and the glory. When humanity marred your work you began a process of rescue. Through your Son you redeemed us. By your Spirit you indwell us. Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship and adore you.

Lord of the Universe, when you made the heavens and the earth they were perfect. Through an act of disobedience by a human, sin entered and polluted your world, and all of creation was affected. We confess that still we fail you. Still we fail to give you all the glory. Placing ourselves at the centre we do not worship you as you designed, and we neglect to love others as you love us. Yet in those who believe on your Son, forgiveness is continually at work. As we confess our sins and shortcomings we are aware once more that we are washed clean. Our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

StF 363 – My Jesus, my Saviour

My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like You All of my days, I want to praise The wonders of Your mighty love My comfort, my shelter Tower of refuge and strength Let every breath, all that I am Never cease to worship You.	Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing Power and majesty, praise to the King Mountains bow down and the seas will roar At the sound of Your name I sing for joy at the work of Your hands Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.
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CCL No. 515642

Psalm 96 (STF 819)

O sing to the Lord a new song; **sing to the Lord, all the earth.**

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; **tell of his salvation from day to day.**

Declare his glory among the nations, **his marvellous works among all the peoples.**

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; **he is to be revered above all gods.**

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, **but the Lord made the heavens.**

Honour and majesty are before him; **strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.**

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, **ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.**

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; **bring an offering, and come into his courts.**

Worship the Lord in holy splendour; **tremble before him, all the earth.**

Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king! **The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.**

He will judge the peoples with equity.'

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; **let the sea roar, and all that fills it;**

let the field exult, and everything in it; **then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord;**

for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

StF 102 – For the beauty of the earth

1) For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies:

*Ch) Gracious God, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.*

2) For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light:

3) For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight:

4) For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled:

5) For each perfect gift and sign
Of your love so freely given,
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

Folliot Sandford Pierpoint

Reading: Matthew 6:24-34

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Sermon

What is it all for, this Earth and all the planets and stars? Why are we here? Why am I here? What is the answer to the ultimate question? For fans of the writings of Douglas Adams, the answer may be 42. For most of us, though, we are looking for a deeper and more meaningful answer.

The world may give shallow responses to these questions: the Earth is here for us to exploit, and it's a playground in which we are to pack as much pleasure and enjoyment into our lives as we can while we have the chance. To the utilitarian person, the world and the Universe are for us to take from, and the beauty of it is something that's nice to have and to look at, but is really an optional extra that can be sacrificed if there's a profit to be made.

Scientists tell us how (they think) the Universe came into being, and speculate on how life arose. However, unless they factor God into their thoughts they cannot begin to answer the "why" questions. The world's answers are human-centred. If they miss God out of the equation then there is no satisfactory answer at all. Let me outline some real, Biblical answers that may satisfy more.

1. The Universe was God's idea. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," so begins the Bible in the first verse of Genesis. The earth and sky and sea and plants and algae and galaxies and humans and mushrooms and neutron stars and mosses and blue supergiant stars were all made by God, deliberately! There is nothing accidental about it.
2. People are made in God's image. This enables people to relate to the Creator in a special way not open to other species.
3. The heavens and the earth are preachers! Psalm 19 says that the heavens tell out the glory of God. The created order is not there in order for us to worship it, but to lead us to worship the one who made it. It is a wrong response to the wonder of the Universe to make it our object of worship. Psalm 96 even says that objects of nature will rejoice in God. If trees can shout for joy before the Lord, how much more should we! The wise scientist will find in nature a signpost to the one who made it all (Romans 1:20 "Ever since the world began, his invisible attributes, that is to say his everlasting power and deity, have been visible to the eye of reason"). In our modern age, more and more evidence comes to light pointing to the existence of a powerful and intelligent creator. There is no reason to be an atheist!
4. Nature is a teacher! From it we can learn wisdom. Jesus entreats his hearers to "look at the birds" and "consider the lilies" in order to learn that their heavenly Father will certainly look after his children. The wisdom book of Proverbs tells us that we can learn about diligence, hard work and forward planning by studying the ant! There is much more in the Bible along these lines.
5. Nature is there to sustain us. Some years ago Princess Anne made a guest appearance on the BBC Countryfile programme, and she was asked the question, "What is the countryside for?" She answered that it is for our survival! This is a counter to those who would argue that parts of the natural world are nice to have but can be sacrificed for profit. The Genesis creation narrative shows that God gave plants that bear fruit as food for human beings. The interdependence of species is testimony to God's design of nature as a sustaining environment. There is an aspect of utility to the created order, but as we have seen, that is certainly not the whole story!
6. The natural world is there for us to take care of. We are here as stewards, to look after it. In Genesis 2:15, God took the man that he had made and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and look after it. The verb translated here as "till" and in some Bible versions as "tend", comes from a Hebrew verb meaning to serve. This word can also be understood as conveying the idea of worship. In Biblical thought, service is worship and worship is service, though of course we do not worship the land but the one who made it. As we look after and cherish the natural world, we find that in doing so we are worshipping God, as we do whenever we serve others with God in mind.

7. We see that the natural world of living things does not function as it should. This shows us that something went wrong and prompts us to ask what that was. Scripture then gives us the answer: we are alienated from God because of sin and we need a Saviour. God sent Jesus to be that Saviour. He conquered death and gives eternal life to those who trust in him and in his resurrection. Sin is still at work in the world but no longer has the last word!
8. (The number 8 in Biblical thought symbolises new beginnings!) The gospel message applies to the whole of creation! Sometimes Christians speak of the gospel as purely being about individual salvation. Now even if that is all it is, it's still an amazing message worth shouting from the housetops! Certainly all individuals have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and need to receive Christ as Saviour, and on receiving him are assured of being in God's presence for ever, and this is an amazing message! However, the gospel is even bigger than that! Colossians 1:19-20 show that through Christ, God is reconciling all things to himself, all things on earth and in heaven. The gospel applies to the whole universe! What that reconciliation will look like is hard to imagine now, but at the end of time it will be revealed in new heavens and earth, a new beginning.

To summarise the whole message:

God made the Universe and all life on Earth according to his plan and purpose. We are called to be faithful stewards of the Earth, which sustains us, points us to God and (in its fallenness) shows us our need of a Saviour. Scripture proclaims to us who that Saviour is, and that by believing in him and receiving his grace we are saved. Eventually, the whole created order will be affected by God's salvation plan in Christ. God's original pattern will be restored. Thanks be to God!

Song – Eternal ruler of the ceaseless round

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| <p>1) Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round
of circling planets singing on their way;
guide of the nations from the night profound
into the glory of the perfect day;
rule in our hearts, that we may ever be
guided and strengthened and upheld by thee.</p> <p>2) We are of thee, the children of thy love,
the brothers of thy well-belovèd Son;
descend, O Holy Spirit, like a dove,
into our hearts, that we may be as one:
as one with thee, to whom we ever tend;
as one with him, our Brother and our Friend.</p> | <p>3) We would be one in hatred of all wrong,
one in our love of all things sweet and fair,
one with the joy that breaketh into song,
one with the grief that trembles into prayer,
one in the power that makes thy children free
to follow truth, and thus to follow thee.</p> <p>4) O clothe us with thy heavenly armour, Lord,
thy trusty shield, thy sword of love divine;
our inspiration be thy constant word;
we ask no victories that are not thine:
give or withhold, let pain or pleasure be;
enough to know that we are serving thee.</p> |
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John W Chadwick

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Lord who made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, accept our praise and thanksgiving for all your works, especially for the gift of salvation and renewal in your Son Jesus the Messiah. Accept also our tithes and offerings within our worship and service. **Amen.**

Mighty God, you made the world a perfect place in which to dwell and worship you. Although people disobeyed your commands and degraded the Earth, the time is coming when you will restore that which humans have marred. Help us meanwhile to live as people of the Kingdom, exercising good stewardship over that which you have entrusted to us. We pray for nations and governments, monarchs and rulers, that policies will be enacted that honour the common heritage of all people, the natural world and its resources.

L: God our Maker **R: renew the heavens and the earth.**

We pray for public organisations and private companies, that they will put people before profits and that they will treat nature with gentleness. We pray for ingenuity to produce innovations that will bring material benefits at the same time as enhancing the natural world and its biodiversity.

L: God our Maker **R: renew the heavens and the earth.**

We pray for those in need in our nation and elsewhere in the world, especially those who have suffered because of someone else's greed and from a world system that is flawed, and those who are climate refugees. We pray for justice and an equitable distribution of wealth.

L: God our Maker **R: renew the heavens and the earth.**

We hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice as we pray for world peace, interceding especially for the Ukraine and seeking an end to the war. We pray for all who are oppressed by unjust regimes. You, Lord, are God of all the Earth and you raise up and cast down. Grant that all nations are blessed with good governance, that oppression and exploitation cease.

L: God our Maker **R: renew the heavens and the earth.**

We pray for the blessing of our nation and wisdom for our government and our king. Grant our leaders the courage to stand with the oppressed and not to partner with unjust regimes. May they follow your ways and work towards restoring the world to how you intended it should be.

L: God our Maker **R: renew the heavens and the earth.**

Bless your Church in this region and this land. May we as Church and Circuit and District work together with others who worship Christ as Lord to spread the gospel that transforms lives and renews the natural order. Guide us into your future plans for this group of churches and prosper us in spirituality and numbers. We pray for those known to us who are in need of healing, comfort, wisdom or provision, that all needs are met from your riches in glory.

L: God our Maker **R: renew the heavens and the earth.**

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 487 – You shall go out with joy

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
And the mountains and the hills shall break
forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy, and the trees of the field
Shall clap, shall clap their hands

And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And you'll go out with joy.

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Blessing

Now to the one who can keep us from falling and set us in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now and for evermore. **Amen**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen.**