

Prayer Silence

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
Yours are the hands with which he can do his work.
Yours are the only feet with which he can go about the world.
Yours are the only eyes through which his compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

St Teresa of Avila 1515 - 1582

Concluding activity

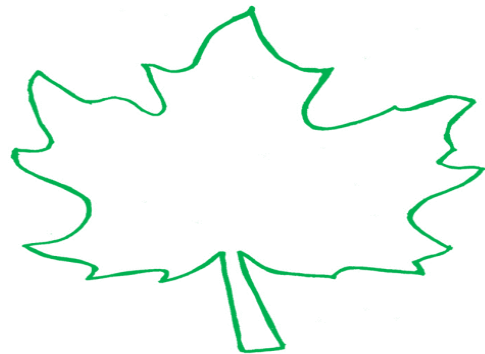
As you look back on this course, perhaps you could use the leaf template and write a simple prayer, a new commitment or just something you want to think more about. You could use it for reflection.

More Poetry for Lent

Janet Morley 'The Heart's Time' SPCK 2011

*This Study Guide was composed by an ecumenical group of
Christians in Birmingham 2017/2018:
Janet Nock, Margaret Healey Pollett, the Revd Alison Geary,
Ruth Tetlow, Miriam Wilcher.*

The authors are happy for people to reproduce all or parts of this study outline providing acknowledgement is given



'Our Common Home: Caring for God's Creation'

An Ecumenical Study Course



Notes for Group Leaders

This is a 5 week study outline for ecumenical Christian Groups. We have chosen an important subject of common concern, and have included reference to some of the many resources produced by a wide range of Christian churches and charities. Each week there is a Bible passage, a prayer, some introductory notes, a poem and suggestions for action or abstinence i.e. things we might do or give up. As a leader it is important that you read all the material provided in advance to give you an overview of the whole course. You can then select what you think will be most useful. In the first meeting you can discuss with the group how long you want to give to reading, discussion and prayer each time. You may find you want to select some of the material provided, rather than using all of it. Please feel free to be flexible and pursue ideas as they come up. It is also important to spend time in **the first session** introducing yourselves to each other. **Each week** you could share current concerns for prayer and also feedback on the previous week's actions. Sharing a cup of tea or coffee together is a natural way of building friendships across different traditions. To prepare for **the final session** you might like to make some green paper leaves for people to write prayers or commitments on.



1.



We don't **intend** to be the cause of hurricanes and floods. We don't **wish** to force Pacific islanders to have to leave their homes because they are under water, but by our over use of fossil fuels we are part of the cause of these frequent disasters.

Other parts of the world have experienced severe hurricanes and flooding that will become more frequent as climate change progresses. What a contrast with the vision of the city of God! We must work to safeguard a future beyond our own, which belongs to our own children and grandchildren and to the world's future generations.

Poem 'The Kingdom'

It's a long way off but inside it
There are quite different things going on:
Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
Back at themselves and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life. It's a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you will purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only and the simple offering
Of your faith, **green as a leaf.**

R.S. Thomas 1913 - 2000

Points for discussion

1. Look back at what you have thought and prayed about during this course. What do you want to remember and what would you like to find out more about ?
2. Find out more about local initiatives to address the issues raised by this course.

18.

Week 5: A vision of God's Realm

Genesis 2 v 15 – 17, Revelation 22 v 1 – 5

Our two Bible passages, drawn from the beginning and end of the scriptures, both share a vision of a tree in a beautiful setting. The first, in Genesis, is an image of a world where good and evil are in the hands of God, and the second is of the water of life flowing through a city, with trees whose leaves are 'for the healing of the nations'.

Beautiful images but both contain a challenge, echoed in the reversals of R. S. Thomas's poem, 'The Kingdom' (next page). It is a good idea from time to time to take a fresh look at our lives, to try to see with God's eyes, and to seek ways to be part of the healing that God wills for the people of the world.

In the Pacific islands, climate change is already forcing people to leave their land.

Assistant Bishop Apimeleki Qiliho from Polynesia, writes:

'Today the land to which I belong is in crisis. The source of my identity and belonging is threatened by the immense changes being brought about by climate change....During storms and high tides, sea water reaches the village green and damages roads, gardens and homes. Thick deposits of sand have damaged the marine ecosystems that we rely on for our livelihoods and daily sustenance.'

(USPG 'Faith in a Changing Climate' info@uspg.org.uk)

So many of our errors are unintentional. When we started using fossil fuels of coal, oil and natural gas they were seen as a means of progress. Now scientists tell us they are one of the root causes of climate change so we have a responsibility to re-think in the light of our new situation.



17.



Introduction

From time to time many Christians set aside time to reflect on their spiritual life, to concentrate on awareness of the presence of God and perhaps to make changes in their lifestyle. This may involve self-denial or possibly making a new commitment.

We believe that God has given us this planet earth, to provide a home for all God's people. We have a responsibility to treat it wisely, acting as caring stewards of God's creation. In today's world of extreme weather events, drought, flooding and the loss of species, it appears that we are abusing this responsibility. We are creating a world where some are relying too much on fossil fuels and many are vulnerable.

Climate change is not an easy topic to think about, but we can find guidance from the scriptures.

We will use **the Lord's Prayer** as a framework and link it with key Bible passages about creation. You might like to pray this prayer at the beginning of each week's study session.



2.

The Lords Prayer

Week 1: *Our Father, who art in heaven...*

You are also at home in the air, the soil, the forests and the oceans.

Hallowed be your name...

By the care we take of creation.

Job 38 v 1 - 21

Week 2: *Your kingdom come...*

All that you see is good,

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...

Your will to till and care,

Give us this day our daily bread...

That all may have sufficient to live life in all its fullness.

Matthew 6 v 25-34

Week 3: *Forgive us our trespasses...*

Our greed, our exploitation, our lack of concern

For other species and future generations

As we forgive those who trespass against us...

By reconciliation with justice and peace.

Luke 12 v 13 - 21

Week 4: *Lead us not into temptation...*

The temptation to equate 'dominion' with exploitation,

And deliver us from evil...

Genesis 1 v 26 - 31

The evil of destroying your gift of creation.

Matthew 4 v 1-11

Week 5: *For yours is the kingdom...*

Yours Lord, not ours,

The power and the glory...

In the cross and resurrection,

For ever and ever...

You were in the beginning and you are the end. *Amen.*

Genesis 2 v 15-17

Revelation 22 v 1-5

(from Eco Congregations of England and Wales)

Prayer

Almighty God,

You created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

You created humankind in your own image and it was very good;

Grant us the courage to recognise our failure to maintain your creation.

By your grace help us to halt the degradation of our environment.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Who came that all may have life in all its fullness. Amen

(The World is our Host 2015)

Suggestion for action or abstinence

1. We throw so much food and packaging away, but Rowan Williams has said '*There is no such thing as 'away''*'. Try to reduce your use of plastic packaging in the coming weeks – even plastic milk and water bottles are made from fossil fuels. When you use plastic, make sure you recycle as much as possible. Could you keep a record and report back next week?
1. Manley Hopkins says: '*...nature is never spent'*'. Look for signs of growth, maybe in a local park or garden or in the countryside, and try to share them with someone – maybe a child.



Poem 'God's Grandeur'

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men not now then reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
All is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.

G. Manley Hopkins 1844- 1889

Points for discussion

1. It has been announced recently that it is now cheaper to produce energy from offshore wind farms than from nuclear power stations. What is your own experience of the various forms of renewable energy generation?
2. Churches and other public bodies usually have to invest their financial assets in organisations that will maximise the return to those who depend on them, but do make exceptions such as arms companies. How is this changing with the growing awareness of the causes and effects of climate change?
See www.operationnoah.org, www.brightnow.org.uk

Week 1: 'The Season of Creation' Job 38 v 1-21

From time to time we need to take the opportunity to turn aside from ordinary routines in order to reflect on what is really significant in our faith and in our lives. What could be more significant than God's relationship with creation including humanity, so dramatically described in the passage from Job? It is a series of challenges – in modern terms it might read:

- how is it that you can explore the solar system and yet cannot ensure all people have enough to eat?
- how is it that you can harness the sun, the wind and the waves to supply power and yet you pollute and poison the earth?
- how is it that you can claim to be able to understand the human genome and yet have to threaten each other with war and destruction?

What Christian leaders say

The central importance of caring for the earth has been borne out by recent statements by church leaders. In 1989, September 1st was declared as a World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. This has now been extended and adopted ecumenically. On September 1st 2017, Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew (Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) issued a joint statement saying they are both convinced that there's no solution to the on-going ecological crisis unless...

'the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, unless we give priority to solidarity and service.'

They stress that care for the environment is inextricably linked with care for the poor,

'The impact of climate change affects, first and foremost, those who live in poverty in every part of the globe.'

Their call has been echoed by the Conference of European Churches, representing a fellowship of 114 churches from all countries of Europe. They have declared 1st September – 4th October the ‘Season of Creation’ for Christians worldwide

Leaders of all Faiths

In June 2015 leaders of all the major faith groups in the UK signed the Lambeth Declaration on Climate Change, which said:

‘From the perspectives of our different faiths we see the earth as a beautiful gift. We are all called to care for the earth and have a responsibility to live creatively and sustainably in a world of finite resources...’

Poem ‘The Bright Field’

I have seen the sun break through
To illuminate a small field
For a while, and gone my way
And forgotten it. But that was the pearl
Of great price, the one field that had
The treasure in it. I realize now
That I must give all that I have
To possess it. Life is not hurrying

On to a receding future, nor hankering after
An imagined past. It is the turning
Aside like Moses to the miracle
Of the lit bush, to a brightness
That seemed as transitory as your youth
Once, but is the eternity that awaits you. *R. S. Thomas 1913 – 2000*

Points for discussion

1. What does it mean to act responsibly towards creation? Reflect on Job 38.
2. What do you think are the most serious threats to the future of planet earth?

5.

Week 4: The evil we don’t mean to commit

Genesis 1 v 26-31

Matthew 4 v 1 - 11

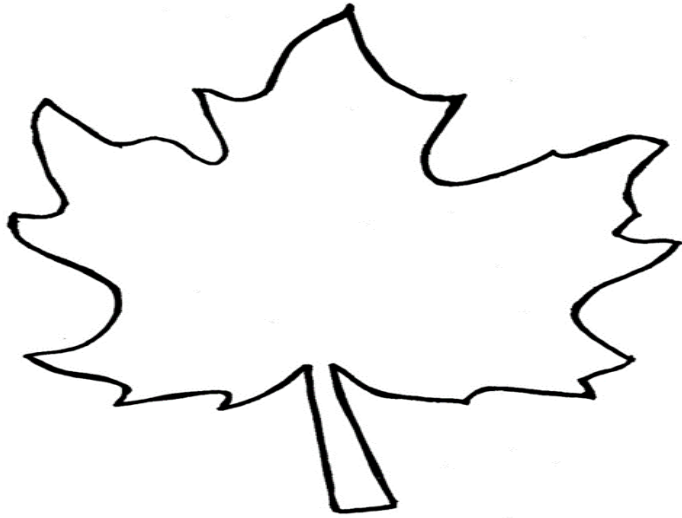
When we read in Genesis 1 v 28 that humanity is given ‘dominion’ over all the other living things on the earth, it helps us to understand how this has led to many Christians thinking that exploitation of the earth’s resources is acceptable to God. However more recent biblical scholars have looked again at this word ‘dominion’ and tell us that stewardship is a more accurate translation of the original meaning. This fits in much better with other biblical evidence and with the belief that God blessed all that God created. Whether we see Genesis as a literal or a poetic depiction of God’s relationship with the world, it is consistent that it is a relationship of loving care, not destruction.

When Jesus was tempted by the Devil, three fundamentally important areas of life were challenged: food, security and power. Matthew’s Jewish audience would probably have thought of the wanderings of the people of Israel in the wilderness led by Moses, and Matthew shows Jesus using the scriptures to defeat the tempter. We too can find important principles in the Bible to guide our actions, even in very different times. We may have experience of giving up something— practising abstinence – or doing something special for spiritual reasons, perhaps in Lent. As we can learn from Muslim friends who practise more stringent fasting during Ramadhan, the most important thing is remembering God in prayer and being more aware of God’s ways than we usually are. This enables us to re-orientate our lives in line with God’s priorities – one of which is surely the care of creation.



14.





3. What does your church do nationally or locally to give people a lead in caring about creation?

Prayer Silence

'Help us to find your Kingdom in the hidden and overlooked places

Help us to go out in joy recognising what is of true worth.

Help us to let go of what has held us

And reinvest with hope in another possible world. **Amen**

(Christian Aid)

Suggestion for action or abstinence

1. Look for opportunities this week to reduce your energy consumption e.g. by turning the heating down a little or by using public transport instead of driving.
2. Look out for your own local 'bright field' e.g. in a local garden or park and really appreciate its beauty



13.



6.

Week 2: 'God knows our needs' Matthew 6 v 25 - 34

This passage from Matthew's gospel is about God's provision for all people. It was written in very different times from our own, when fuel was largely wood and travel was by foot or on animals such as donkeys, with horses for the wealthy and powerful. How do the same principles apply now, when reckless use of the earth's resources by some people endangers the lives of us all, particularly the poor?

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that climate change is occurring and is caused by the excessive presence in the atmosphere of the so called greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. The primary source of carbon dioxide is the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas in industry, energy generation and transport. Methane and other gases are generated from agricultural practices as well as industry. Nitrous oxide comes mainly from fertilisers and livestock waste products. As economic development takes place around the world – and more people enjoy fullness of life – the output of these gases is growing rapidly, but it is the lifestyles of highly industrialised nations like our own that have contributed most.

We will continue to need to use electricity but generation from renewable sources such as water, sun, waves and wind is becoming increasingly economic and acceptable, not least in the less economically developed parts of the world.

The Revd Samitiana Jhonson writes from Madagascar:
'...the most obvious experience of climate change is how unusual it is to have so many cyclones. During the hot season we now have 3 or 4 cyclones each year. Not only is the number of cyclones increasing but so is their speed and strength...'



7.



Points for discussion

1. What do you think this reference to the bread and wine used in communion means?
2. Discuss ways in which our 'greed' can be reduced by consuming less and recycling more, while trying to avoid being holier than thou.
3. Some translations say 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' How might this be a helpful way to think of our relationship with creation?

Suggestions for action or abstinence

1. Is it possible to appreciate your abundant water supply by reducing your water consumption?
2. Look at your bank statement in the light of this story.
3. Find out about churches nearby that have taken these challenges seriously and become Eco Churches, at www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk or Live Simply churches at www.cafod.org.uk. Are there difficulties in taking these concerns up in your own church? How may they be overcome?

Prayer of confession

We confess our sins and the sins of our society, in the misuse of God's creation.

God our Mother, we are sorry for the times when we have lived at the expense of the earth.

Lord have mercy

We belong to a people who are well fed but ignore the cry of the hungry. We expect to travel quickly without counting the cost.

Christ have mercy

We store up goods for ourselves and our families as if there were no God and no tomorrow.

Lord have mercy

God hears our prayers and forgives our sins.

Thanks be to God Amen

12.

He says: **‘to be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment’ (236)**. He refers to the eucharist or holy communion, with its handling of bread and wine, as joining heaven and earth, embracing and penetrating all creation.

[Numbers in brackets indicate paragraphs of Laudato Si’: Encyclical of Pope Francis 2013]

Poem ‘Wealth and Poverty’

We have wounds
but they take away our medicine.
we are hungry
but they take away our bread.
and here we suffer
and there they are happy
and here we weep
and there they laugh
and we die
and there they are happy and
laugh
and we are poor
and they are rich
we without possessions
they owners
slaves
Lords.

But we, we have more:
we have light
we have water
we have life.
Life, water, light
are everlasting.
They will not perish with
the dollar.
We have God

Humberto Lizardi 1947- 1973

[A Methodist student leader who was assassinated in Chile]



11.

At the same time, because the temperature is also rising, the south part of the island is becoming drier. The drought is critical and has led to famine. Last November, the Bishop of Toliara visited a parish to perform a christening, and a week later five of the children that had been christened had died due to a lack of food and drinking water.’ (see pictures over the page)

(Faith in a Changing Climate USPG)

Poem ‘An Autumn midnight’

A shaded lamp and a waving blind,
And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
On this scene enter – winged, horned and spined –
A longlegs, a moth, and a Dumbledore;
While ‘mid my page there idly stands
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands....
Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point in time, at this point in space,
My guests besmear my new-penned line,
Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
‘God’s humblest, they!’ I muse. Yet why?
They know Earth-secrets that know not I

Thomas Hardy 1840- 1928

[Note: a Dumbledore is a bumble bee]

Points for discussion

1. When you pray ‘Give us this day our daily bread’, what are you thinking of?
2. If Jesus is speaking about what matters most (Matt 6 v 25), what does this mean to you?
3. What do you know about the effects of climate change that are already happening

8.

Prayer: Silence

If you are asking questions such as: what is the purpose of my life in this world? Why am I here? What is the goal of all my work and my efforts,

let's journey together.

If you want to slow down and look at reality in a different way, promote best practice, stimulate creative solutions and encourage group and individual initiatives,

let's journey together.

Yes, we are called to live wisely, think deeply, love generously and sing as we go. ***Amen.***

Part of a 'Laudato Si' Litany: Susy Brouard/CAFOD

Suggestions for action or abstinence

1. Cattle produce methane, which is a greenhouse gas. Can you find out more about the effects of meat and milk production on the planet and consider altering your shopping and eating habits?
1. Can you 'fast' in some way and give the money saved to a good cause?

Below: March 2017 Madagascar cyclone damage



9.

Week 3: Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Luke 12 v 13-21

This passage from St Luke's gospel is about greed and inequality. The rich man in the story is thinking only of himself and not about those who had worked on his land to produce the ample produce he possessed. He is accused of not being 'rich towards God.' Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* quotes Patriarch Bartholomew as saying:

'inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage',

we are called to acknowledge:

'our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation.' And, ***'to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God' (7).***

The rich man in the story had no time to repent but we do have time. How can we best 'become rich towards God' (Luke 12 v 21)? To quote Pope Francis again, writing in *Laudato Si'*:

'we need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that 'less is more' (222). What do you think this means?

Below: March 2017 Madagascar drought at the other end of the island.



10.