



**St Stephen's
Ealing**

Creationtide

1 Sept to 4 Oct

**Community growing
in the love of Jesus**

Creationtide

This is a relatively new season in the church calendar. It was established in 2007 by the European Ecumenical Assembly and has been adopted by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The season runs from 1st September to 4th October - the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. St Francis is the patron saint of ecologists. During Creationtide churches are encouraged to focus particularly on 'the protection of creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles.'

At St Stephen's we would usually have a special service to celebrate Creationtide. In 2020 we were unable to meet together as a full congregation so we decided to produce this booklet to help people focus on creation at home. We have subsequently become aware of wider interest in the booklet and so have reproduced it with some small revisions. We hope that people will enjoy using it both at St Stephen's and beyond.

Environmental problems seem so huge we are tempted to despair or ignore them believing that there is nothing we as individuals can do to make a difference. This is not true. Everyone can play a part. Even a great lake is made up from individual drops of water. We can all help to make a difference and lots of small, individual, positive actions are needed to bring about big changes for the better. Taking steps to combat such big issues as climate change, habitat degradation, water pollution and the extinction of species helps us to combat any despair we may feel, can be fun and often leads to meeting interesting people and making new friends.

There is a topic to consider for each one of five weeks (and beyond if you wish) with a selection of thoughts and actions relating to a specific aspect of creation. We hope you will choose to follow up some of these. They are only tasters; there is so much more you can explore and so much more to do.

Enid Barron

Sue Charlton

September 2021

Why Christians should care for creation

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. Genesis 1: 31

We are commanded to love God and to love our neighbour. If we harm the beautiful world God has created for us and our fellow creatures to enjoy we show ourselves to be ungrateful and we dishonour him. When we fail to be good stewards of the world we harm our fellow human beings and all else that God has made.

Many of the actions which cause damage to creation come from what as Christians we call sin: greed, envy and sloth (laziness) as well as ignorance and thoughtlessness.

In the words of the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew 'to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.'¹

Christ's death on the cross was for the redemption of **all** creation – not just the human part. (see Colossians 1: 19-20).

The Anglican Church recognises our duty to look after God's world in one of its Five Marks of Mission:

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Some people refer to the natural world as God's Book of Works and regard studying creation as a way to help us understand God. The present Pope writes that St Francis: 'invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.'²

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. Romans 1: 20 (NRSV).

Over the next few weeks you are invited to take time to study the Book of Works and see what you can learn from this about God and the part we can play in building his kingdom here on earth.

¹ Address in Santa Barbara, California, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 1997.

² Laudato Si' – Encyclical Letter, Pope Francis, 2015

Trees

The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. Genesis 2: 9a

We probably all admire trees except when their roots damage our drains or clutter our driveways with fallen leaves. During lockdown many people on their daily walk particularly enjoyed looking at trees as they came into leaf and blossom. Our affection for trees should not be limited to valuing their outward appearance. Our lives depend on them as they act as the lungs of the earth, sucking in carbon dioxide and breathing out oxygen. Without them we and all our fellow creatures would die.

They are one of our best defences against global warming.
They help with drainage and to stabilise land.
They support many other species and regulate eco systems.



Golden poplar, Surbiton

They provide us with:

Food - fruit and nuts; fuel; building materials; paper; medicines; shelter from sun, rain, wind and sound.

Trees are truly amazing but the human race is destroying them. In 2020 alone the planet lost an area of tree cover larger than the UK.³ In the UK itself woodland cover has increased over the past 100 years but there has been widespread loss of trees outside woods; much of our woodland is in a very poor state and is coming under increasing pressure from a barrage of threats. The Woodland Trust recommend that the current rate of woodland creation should be quadrupled.⁴



Burning forest. Wyoming, USA

³ Global forest loss increased in 2020, Rhett A Butler, Mongabay, March 2021.

⁴ The State of the UK's Woods and Trees, Woodland Trust, 2021

Find our more

The more you get to know about trees the more fascinating they become. Take time this week to explore the world of trees. Here are some ideas.

Find out in how many ways tree bark and tree sap are used by human beings.

Have a closer look at tree trunks. As children and maybe as adults too we tend to draw tree trunks as brown. Tree trunks actually come in a huge range of colours and with the bark creating fascinating designs. Here are just a few examples:



Some bark varieties seen on a short walk in Kew Gardens

Next time you walk past a tree take a closer look at the bark. How many colours can you see? If you enjoy painting, drawing or embroidery try to replicate some of the colours and create a design using these and the patterns of the bark.

Explore the concept of tree bathing; it is said to have health benefits. Is it something you might try? Don't worry, it does not involve swimsuits!

Get hold of and read *The Hidden Life of Trees*⁵; you'll be amazed.

What you can do

Join the Woodland Trust or make a one off donation to it. You could dedicate a tree or trees in one of over 50 woods across the UK to mark a special occasion.

Reduce the amount of paper you use; only print documents when essential; set your computer to print on both sides of a sheet. When buying paper products look for brands made from recycled materials or bamboo based alternatives. Try The Woodland Trust for printer paper, The Cheeky Panda or Who Gives a Crap for toilet rolls etc. Recycle any wastepaper; don't throw it out with general waste.



Look for the Forest Stewardship Council® logo when buying any forest based products.

⁵ Peter Wohlleben, 2015

Earth

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1: 1

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2: 7a

For dust you are and to dust you shall return. Genesis 3: 19

While Genesis 1 shows the fundamental importance of earth do we feel diminished by the idea that our bodies might have developed from it and will end up as soil? Perhaps we should feel honoured that we have a close affinity with such a wonderful, complex and life-giving substance. For soil is our life support system. Without soil we would have nothing.



Ready for sowing, Norfolk

Sadly people are doing much which harms the land. Intensive farming is damaging both the structure and nutritional value of the soil. We pollute land with our waste. Climate change is creating deserts and wasteland where land was once fertile. The list goes on. What a way to treat God's gift of 'mother' earth.

Households in the UK produce enough rubbish every two hours to fill the Royal Albert Hall. The weight of waste we produce in a year is equivalent to that of three and a half million double decker buses.⁶

Across the world about 24 billion tons of fertile soil per year are being lost mainly because of unsustainable agricultural practices. At this rate it is possible that up to 95% of earth's land areas could become degraded by 2050.⁷

For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, Sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Leviticus 25: 3-5

It is clear from the Bible that God requires us to be good stewards of the soil.

⁶ 20 Facts About Waste and Recycling, C.B. Environmental Ltd

⁷ Land Degradation: Global Environment Facility

Find out more

Earth's soil stores vast amounts of CO₂. Research via the web or reference books the part soil can play in combatting climate change.

What type of soil do you have in your garden or local park? What grows well where you live, or where you visit? Discover how the soil affects the plants that grow naturally in each area.

Try to get better acquainted with soil, run some through your fingers, squeeze it smell it. Check out the soil when you visit different parts of the country.

A handful of soil looks pretty dull. Discover more about the various organisms which live within and you will find it is teeming with life. We owe our wellbeing to these minute and often invisible life forms.

Explore the Soil Association (<https://www.soilassociation.org/>) or Royal Horticultural Society (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/>) websites for information about soil types and what plants thrive on different soils.

[Jesus] spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **John: 9: 6**

While the healing of the blind man in this Gospel account had more to do with the person of Jesus than the therapeutic properties of mud there is evidence that earth does have healing properties. What can you find out about this?

What you can do

Ensure that land over which you have control is well cared for. Feed the earth in your garden and/or allotment with plenty of organic material and avoid the use of chemicals which may damage the soil and its inhabitants. Do not use peat based composts since peat extraction damages valuable and fragile habitats.

Avoid covering soil with impermeable materials such as concrete. If a hard surface is required in your garden select a permeable option (see for example: Environment Agency: Guidance on the Permeable Surfacing of Front Gardens - <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/>).

Try to buy food which is produced organically in order to ensure that land has not been damaged in its production.

Make compost out of uncooked fruit and vegetable remains.

Water

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1: 2

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the **water**. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. Matthew 3: 16

We are used to associating the Holy Spirit with wind and fire. Here we find him associated with water too. As well as being a practical necessity water has a huge spiritual significance. It is the element which washes away sin; its use by Jesus as he cleans his disciples' feet indicates the life of service to which we are called. Jesus likens his gift to humanity to water as he tells the Samaritan woman that drinking the water which he will give provides a spring welling up to eternal life (John 4: 14).

In this country most of us take water for granted. We think we have enough, sometimes rather too much. Is the care of water something which should concern us this Creationtide? It is.

Climate change means that water which has been locked up as ice for millions of years is melting at a rate of 10 Olympic swimming pools and is being added to the oceans every second.⁸ This could lead to a possible rise in sea levels of up to 1.1m this century.⁹ Many of the poorest countries of the world are low-lying. Already their land has been lost to the sea, or rendered too saline to farm.



Ice breaking away,
Antarctic

Conversely less fresh water is available for drinking, washing and watering crops. Already 1.1 billion people lack access to fresh water. By 2025 two thirds of the world's population may be facing water shortages.¹⁰



Dried up river bed.
Nevada, USA

We pollute the world's water. Pesticides and fertilizers from agricultural land, discharge from factories and the dreaded plastic, to name but a few culprits, find their way into rivers and seas. We also cause damage when we disrupt the natural flow of water to divert and store it for our needs. Our human activities can lead to the degradation of habitats and ecosystems, flooding in some areas and rivers drying up in others.

⁸ <https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/climate-change/global-warming/the-melting-ice-caps>

⁹ IPCC: Sea Level Rise is a Present and Future Danger, 2019

¹⁰ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/water-scarcity>

Find out more

See what the World Wildlife Fund is doing to promote water stewardship and to protect wetlands: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/water-scarcity>. It's well worth dipping into other parts of the WWF website too.

Explore the Environment Agency's website for information about changes to the coastline and flooding risks in the UK and plans to cope with these.

This National Geographic website: <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/where-our-water-goes>, gives information about future water shortages in the UK, shows the ways in which we waste water and suggests steps we can take to reduce consumption.

The Clean Seas campaign <https://www.cleanseas.org/> provides information about the devastating effects of plastics in our oceans and what action we can take.

Find out about those minute pieces of plastic such as microfibres and microbeads which appear in unexpected places such as cosmetics and clothing. They get into the seas, damage marine life and contaminate the food chain, including what we consume.

What you can do

Join the WWF or make a one off donation to support its work.

Take care not to waste water - see some of the ideas from the National Geographic website above. You could make a start by not leaving the tap running when you wash your hands or clean your teeth. Take a shower in preference to a bath and don't linger - tempting though it is!

Choose clothes made from natural materials such as cotton (preferably organic), linen, viscose, silk and bamboo. See tips on how to reduce plastic shedding from other materials: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/plastics/microfibres-plastic-in-our-clothes>

Support vulnerable communities through Toilet Twinning's Tap-twinning campaign: <https://www.toilettwinning.org/tap-twinning/>

Take a little time to reflect and pray near a pond, a stream, or some other patch of water you find particularly soothing. Watch its movement and the way it reflects other things, see if there is any wildlife enjoying it. Can you imagine the Holy Spirit hovering over it? Give thanks to God for the blessing water brings and ask for forgiveness for when we fail in our duty to care for it.

Wildlife pool, Salthouse,
Norfolk



Air

The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life Job 33: 4

And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit". John 20: 22

The creation stories in the Bible make no specific reference to the creation of air but we become aware in Genesis 2: 7 that it is from God as he breathed into the nostrils of the first man to give him life. Job acknowledges that it is the breath of the Almighty that gives life. In John we see the Holy Spirit coming from breath and in Acts through the air, 'like the blowing of a violent wind' (Acts 2: 2).



Smoke at Ironbridge, the birthplace of the industrial revolution

Humanity is seriously damaging the air. By producing excessive amounts of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (mainly from burning fossil fuels) and methane (mainly from intensive livestock production) we are creating a sort of thickening blanket round the earth which prevents the heat from the sun dispersing adequately. As a result the air temperature round the earth has increased by about 1°C since the start of the industrial revolution - c 1750. This is already having serious consequences including more severe and more frequent extreme weather events, melting ice and rising sea levels, extensive fires, more areas suffering drought and others flooding.¹¹

If we keep adding to the greenhouse gases at the current rate a temperature increase of 4°C (or more) by the end of the century is predicted.¹² The consequences will be disastrous for much of life on earth. Urgent action is essential.

There are previous instances of the air around earth becoming much hotter or colder but the changes have taken places slowly over thousands of years. Scientific evidence shows that the recent rapid changes are mainly the result of human activity.

We are also damaging the quality of the air we breathe because of substances such as particulates which we disperse into it. We have been shocked by recent figures for deaths from Covid 19. Almost as shocking is an annual premature death toll of up to 36,000 in the UK linked to long-term exposure to air pollution¹³ - much of it the result of emissions from motor vehicles.

Corona virus lockdown showed rather dramatically what removing motor transport can do as we saw pictures of clear skies over usually smog shrouded cities such as Beijing and Delhi. Air quality in London was noticeably improved.

¹¹ For up to date assessment see State of the UK Climate 2020, M Kendal et al., International Journal of Climatology, 2021.

¹² <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change>

¹³ Committee on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, 2018.

Find out more

Read 'Laudato Si' (praise be to you) written by Pope Francis in 2015, probably the best, most accessible and succinct work on climate change and all aspects of care for creation. Buy, borrow or download a copy - <https://laudatosi.com/watch>.

Explore the Grantham Institute's website <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/grantham/> and sign up to receive its newsletters. Not only does it explain climate change and its impacts but also gives information about ways of tackling the problems. Their 9 things you can do about climate change: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/grantham/publications/9-things-you-can-do-about-climate-change.php> is a helpful guide to individual action.

Join one of the Future Learn (<https://www.futurelearn.com/>) on line short courses such as Tipping Points: Climate Change and Society, Climate Change: the Science and Climate Change: Solutions.

Search the web for sites giving advice on driving in a greener way including reducing the emission of particulates.

Things you can do

Turn down the regular setting on your heating thermostat by a degree or two and put on an extra layer or layers if you start to feel cold.

When you boil the kettle save energy by only filling it with the amount of water you actually need. If cooking on a hob keep the lid on the pan unless the recipe requires evaporation or constant stirring.

Dry clothes on an outdoor line or indoors on a rack rather than using the tumble drier. Natural drying also reduces the dispersal of plastic microfibres.

Switch your domestic energy provider to one of the green energy suppliers such as Green Energy UK, Ecotricity and Good Energy. Your current supplier may also offer a green alternative.

Clean up your travel: where practicable walk, cycle or use public transport. Car share. Cut your air miles.

When changing your car go for an electric or hybrid one.

Do not leave TVs or other machines/devices on standby; they are still using energy.

Drying naturally



Mini beasts

Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise! Proverbs 6: 6

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Acts 2: 44

The context in Proverbs indicates the author believes we can learn from ants because they are so industrious. Maybe there is something else we can learn from ants, that is how to work together as a community for the common good. In this they resonate with the ideal community of early believers as described in Acts.



The bug hotel

A few years ago we decided to establish a bug hotel in the garden at St Stephen's. 'Why on earth do you want to do that?' we were asked. The answer is that we wanted to encourage care for mini beasts. These assorted tiny creatures such as insects, spiders and worms are fascinating and in their different ways vital to the rest of earth's inhabitants, not least the human race.

These mini beasts could manage very well without us but we could not manage without them. For instance 'without their composting services we would be knee deep in dead leaves, dung and dead animals.'¹⁴ They do so much else as well; worms, ants and other tiny creatures keep the soil fertile and aerated. Bees, wasps, butterflies, hoverflies, lacewings and other pollinators are essential to many sources of food. The silkworm produces beautiful thread; slug mucus can play a part in medical treatments; the cochineal beetle gives us a dye.

Between them mini beasts have a range of attributes and talents we might envy. Which of us can jump 38 times our body length as the flea can, carry an object 50 times our own weight like the leaf cutter ant or direct our friends to the best restaurants by performing a dance as bees do?

Sadly the automatic reaction of many adults to the sight of a mini beast is to kill it. On a larger scale a variety of human actions are having an adverse effect on mini beast populations; use of pesticides and insecticides, climate change and intensive farming to name a few.

Creationtide is the time to start loving mini beasts, to value the part they play in life on earth and to protect them from thoughtless destruction.

Earth worms - helping
on the allotment



¹⁴ Nick Baker's Bug Book, Nick Baker, Bloomsbury 2015

Find out more

Explore the website of one of the organisations involved with assorted mini beasts e.g. Buglife <https://www.buglife.org.uk/>, Butterfly Conservation <https://butterfly-conservation.org/>, the British Arachnological Society (spiders) <http://britishspiders.org.uk/>

Find out about the work of your local natural history society or nature reserve e.g. Selborne Society and Ealing Wildlife Group in relation to mini beasts.

Discover what you can about one or two mini beasts, maybe one you find appealing like a bee or a butterfly and then one you find off putting: maybe an ant, a worm, a wasp or a slug. They are mainly fascinating and you might develop a respect even for the ones you don't find attractive.

Go to Kew Gardens and visit The Hive to discover the world of bees.

Mark off a small patch of ground in your garden, allotment or some other open space and record how many mini beasts you find there in half an hour. Do you know what they all are? Scratch away to look below the surface if you are in a place where it is ok to do this.



The Hive at Kew

Things you can do

Wherever possible avoid using pesticides and insecticides.

If mini beasts in the home are causing real harm try controlling them by natural means. Horse chestnuts can be used to ward off clothes moths. Plants such as basil, rosemary and lavender help to deter flies.

Become a keen compost maker and use this to feed the soil.

Consult a copy of The Green Garden Expert.¹⁵



Busy bees on a sunflower

Use companion planting to deter pests from crops e.g. nasturtiums to keep aphids from French and runner beans, mint to confuse would be attackers of tomatoes, carrots and brassicas. Pot marigolds and tagetes (French and African marigolds) can be true gardeners' friends. Not only do they look attractive but they deter a range of pests even in their after-life when dug into the soil.

Slugs can destroy plants swiftly. Copper collars around flower pots may deter them. Some gardeners swear by broken eggshells or layers of grit or coffee grounds around susceptible plants.

Create outdoor habitats for mini beasts. A bug hotel can be as simple as a terracotta flower pot stuffed with twigs. A small pile of dead logs will provide a lovely home for a range of beetles and for solitary bees.

Grow plants that attract pollinators. Seed packets are often marked accordingly.

¹⁵ The Green Garden Expert, D. G. Hessayon

Some of the Activity in the Church

The Christian environmental charity, A Rocha UK, set up the Eco Church scheme in 2016. Several thousand churches from different denominations are registered with Eco Churches and the number continues to grow. St Stephen's is one of these churches and has now gained a silver award.

In 2020 the Church of England launched a tool by which the carbon footprint of each church and cathedral can be measured annually enabling them to keep track of carbon emissions with the aim of reducing these. Building on this the Church is now developing a toolkit to measure energy usage in other types of building and for work related travel.

The same year the Church of England agreed a target of reducing its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 and at London Diocesan Synod the Bishop of London said that: 'Climate change remains the biggest existential threat we face and we need to ensure that the economic rebuilding from this [Covid] crisis is environmentally friendly.' Creation Care is an important feature of the Diocese of London's 2030 Vision.

The bodies which invest money for the Church of England are committed to withdrawing investment from fossil fuel companies if they have not aligned their businesses with the Paris climate agreement by 2023. The Church's lead has encouraged other investors to follow suit.

The Climate Coalition includes major Christian Charities such as Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund. It campaigns for a cleaner, greener future. Action includes an annual mass lobby of MPs.

Both the national church website and that for the Diocese of London have comprehensive sections on the environment explaining the issues, actions taken and proposed and providing resources. See:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change> and <https://www.london.anglican.org/mission/environment/>.

In February 2019 the Archbishop of Canterbury convened a meeting to discuss Climate Change Migrants and Refugees.

The Anglican Communion Environmental Network was formally established in 2002 to work across the Anglican Communion to encourage by various means sustainable environmental practices. See <https://acen.anglicancommunion.org/>.

Heart symbols from Climate Coalition's Show the Love campaign



**Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
¹² Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
¹³ Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.**

Psalm 96: 11-13a

Extract from Just Walk to Jerusalem Prayer.

**Walk softly upon the earth. May its beauty surround you
May its wisdom delight you, Its music invite you
May you love and be loved, May you know peace and practice compassion
Rejoice in the earth and in all of creation. Chris Rose, Amos Trust**

Unless otherwise stated all Bible references are from the NIV (New International Version).

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