

Pentecost 2015

"The earth is the Lord's"

During this year's Pentecost Prayers our church family, as requested by the DRC Eastern Synod and several synodical task teams for ecology, reflects together on the truth that God created us wonderfully, and in union with the rest of creation. We also reflect on our vocation to care for the earth that has been entrusted to us and to preserve it, in the likeness of our Creator.

While many of us have become sensitive to the great challenges we face today in general with respect to ecology, the question is how the Lord expects that we should deal with creation, more particularly with the earth and with our fellow creatures.

- To whom does creation and the earth actually belong? What is our place in it as humans? And if the creation is not ours, but God's, how should we think about it and how do we work with it? What attitude does the Lord require of his children who wish to live a sanctified life towards the work of his hands?

In this series, we ponder important aspects and we ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes, and to give us loving hearts and warm hands, in our dealings with creation and the earth.

- Wherever you can, come together as leaders from the DRC family and reflect on the series in the light of Isaiah's words: "Don't you know? Haven't you heard? The Lord is the everlasting God; He created all the world (Isaiah 40:28).

- The series emphasizes that the earth belongs to the Lord. Because many of our congregations have 10 prayer meetings as well as Pentecost Feast, we reflect on eleven successive sub themes:

- (1) The heavens proclaim our Lord's glory (Ps 19: 2- 7, 15; Rev 4:11; 10: 6);
- (2) and the earth is our and our Lord's dwelling place (Gen 1: 26-28, 31; John 1: 1- 5, 14);
- (3) over which he reigns as the Reconciler (Col 1: 15-20).
- (4) His Spirit reigns in us and gives us insight (Rom 8: 9-11; Ps 8);
- (5) to see the earth and give thanks to the Creator (Job 38; 39);
- (6) to hear his creation's groans (Rom 8:19-22);
- (7) to respect the earth's integrity (Isaiah 45: 1a, 5-8);
- (8) and to care for it (Gen 2: 4-15);
- (9) to be generous and serving towards our fellow creatures (2 Cor 9: 10-15);
- (10) sacrificing and sharing, living in simplicity and frugal (Acts 2: 43-47; 4: 32-37; 2 Cor 8:10-15).
- (11) because we confess, "The earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24: 1-10), and we honour his reign with the whole of creation (Rev 5: 8-14)

- We greatly appreciate all our co-workers who helped to make these reflections available to the church. They are Anton Doyer, Siphon Makoena and Thinus Prinsloo, Gustav Claasen and Victor Pillay, Lourens Schoeman and Dingane Mosili, Carl Lourens and Jimmy Frans, Carl Swart and Rachel Mash, Arnold van der Westhuizen and Sydney Saayman, Schalk van Wyk and Mizelle Prinsloo, David Kuyler and Andries Hofmann, Hendrik Groenewald and Attie du Plessis.

David Botha and Juanita Greyvenstein composed a liturgy for repetitive use.

- We trust that the Holy Spirit will use this year's series to fine tune us with each other, to impose on us the thoughts of our Lord's own heart and to transform us to be useful in the care of all that He had created for his own and for our joy, with great love and care.

May Pentecost in your congregation have blessed consequences and give joy to creation and our Creator.

Eddie Orsmond, Donald Gantana, Gideon van der Watt and Johan Botha (on behalf of the United Ministry for Service and Witness)

Hymns to consider

Liedboek No's 19, 29, 198, 199, 280, 292, 308, 354, 395, 421, 456, 458, 460, 499, 532, 563;
Sionsgesange 7, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 34, 38, 42, 65, 102, 126, 130, 218, 206, 257,
260, 310, 317, 323, 337, 403; Hosanna 5, 9, 30, 44, 62, 89, 106, 125, 137, 142, 225, 257, 282, 288,
296, 323, 353,

Sources to consider

McKnight, S. 2007. *A Community called Atonement*. Abingdon Press. Nashville.

Migliore, Daniel L. 2004. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids

Newbegin JEL 1990. *Come Holy Spirit- Renew the whole creation*.

<http://www.newbegin.net/assets/pdf/90chs.pdf>

Task Team of URCSA and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany. 2010. *Dreaming a different World (Globalisation and Justice for Humanity and the Earth - The challenge of the AccraConfession for the Churches)*.

LITURGY

Notes to accompany the use of this liturgy

We have prepared only one liturgy for all the meetings during this Pentecost. We share the following motivation with you:

1. Responsive liturgies give opportunity to all congregants to take part. It facilitates a process in which the congregation acquires one voice.
2. The idea is that responsive liturgies, filled with litanies, should become part of our bloodstream (heart). Repetition is necessary for that to happen. In the beginning one takes part as an observer. Through repetition, however, one becomes a participant and grows into the realities that the liturgy speaks and prays. We therefore encourage you to use this liturgy continuously throughout this Pentecost.
3. Liturgies create and become the context in which the congregation meets God. By using this one liturgy we create and provide one context for this Pentecost that will unite the series. This should contribute to the depth and impact it may have.
4. We have provided for diversity however. You will find alternatives and a variety of prayers that you can use. Make your choice according to the focus of each meeting.

One of the old Christian traditions that include nature as part of their spirituality is the Celtic tradition. This spirituality is not foreign to people from Africa. We are people of the soil, air and water. In our search for liturgical material we can however learn a lot from the Celtic tradition. This liturgy is based on a liturgy from the Celtic Prayer Book and was enriched by some other sources.

May God use this Pentecost to open our hearts and minds to understand what it means to live as God's children and witnesses on the earth and in space (already filled with our debris!)

Leader God of life, you summon the day to dawn
 and call us to create with you.

All You are the Rock
 from which all earth is fashioned.
 You are the Food from which all souls are fed.
 You are the Force

from which all power lines travel.
You are the Source who is creation's head.

SYMBOLIC RITUAL

[The lighting of three candles acknowledges the presence of the Triune God on this earth.
You will need: 3 candles (preferably different colours, one of which can be a floating candle)
3 bowls (one filled with ground, one filled with water and the last with wild seeds)]

Lighting of the 1st Candle (Head Candle)

Leader We invite the presence of God, the Creative Source, to enliven our minds as we light the first of our three candles. With this fire, let us remember the *Earth* that grounds us and on which we have built our homes ...
All Lord, God, we welcome your presence into the Earth.

Lighting of the 2nd Candle (Heart Candle)

Leader We ask Jesus, who began his ministry in the waters of the Jordan, to energise our hearts in outreach to those who struggle and need our help. With this candle, we honour the *Water* that refreshes us and satisfies our thirst.
All Jesus, we invite you to be present in all the waterways and oceans of the world.

Lighting of the 3rd Candle (Hands Candle)

Leader Come Holy Spirit, blow the breath of grace throughout our lives today and influence all that we do with our hands. With this flame, we revere the *Air* that we breathe.
All Holy Spirit, we invite you to move throughout the atmosphere of the world.

THANKSGIVING

First Creator God, how great you are!
You clothe yourself in light.
You stretch out the skies like a tent.

Second Winds are your messengers.
Flames are your servants.
You water the earth until it gives us food.

First How abundant are your works, O God.
In wisdom have you made them all.

Second The creatures teeming the earth,
the sea, vast and wide –
innumerable things, small and great,
live within it –
all things look to you for their food in due season.
When you send forth your Spirit they are created
and you renew the face of the earth.

First May your glory shine for ever.
May you always have joy in what you have created.

Second May our thoughts always give you pleasure.
May we always rejoice in you.

THE GLORY OF CREATION

Leader For earth and sea and sky in the harmony of colour,
All we give you thanks, O God.
Leader For the air of the eternal seeping through the physical,
All we give you thanks, O God.
Leader For the everlasting glory dipping into time,
All we give you thanks, O God.
Leader For nature resplendent,
growing beasts,
emergent crops,
singing birds,
the energies of the city,
All we give you thanks, O God.
Leader For the Person you sent to restore us
when we fell away from the goodness of your creation,
All we give you thanks, O God.
Leader For harmony restored through your Spirit
moving upon the turbulent waters of our lives,
All we give you thanks, O God.
Leader For the honour you give us
of lives flowing in the rhythms of your tides,
All we give you thanks, O God.
Leader For setting each of us, like the stars upon their courses,
within the orbit of your love,
All we give you thanks, O God.

or

Reader Loving God, loving God,
all creation calls you blessed,
All and so do we, and so do we.
Reader Loving God,
all your creation calls you blessed.
Your spirit imprints the whole universe with life and mystery.
Yes, all creation proclaims your love.
All We now join this chorus of praise.
Reader Loving God,
all of nature calls you blessed,
All and so do we, and so do we.
Reader For you have woven an intimate tapestry
and called it life
All and called it good.
Reader In love you have formed a universe
so diverse yet so related,
and into its web you call us forth

All to walk the land and swim the sea
with all our natural brothers and sisters.

Reader To the stars
we seem no more than blades of grass.
Yet to you, each of us,
as each blade of grass and each star,
is an irreplaceable treasure,
an essential companion on this journey of love.

Reader Loving God, as you lure the whole world into salvation,
guide us with your Spirit
that we might not be only pilgrims on the earth,
All but pilgrims with the earth,
journeying home to you.

Reader Open our hearts to understand
the intimate relationship that you have with all creation.
Only with this faith can we hope
for tomorrow's children.
Amen. Alleluia!

Reader Loving God, loving God,
all creation calls you blessed,
All and so do we, and so do we.

Source unknown

CREDO

All I believe, O God of all gods,
that you are the eternal creator of life.
I believe, O God of all gods,
that you are the eternal Father of love.
I believe, O Lord and God of the peoples,
That you are the Creator of the high heavens.
I believe, O Lord and God of the peoples,
that you created my soul and set its warp. Amen.

Sing a few songs.

CONFESSION of GUILT

Leader Creator and Saviour,
we have exploited the earth for our selfish ends,
turned our backs on the cycles of life
and forgotten we are your stewards.
Now soils become barren,
air and water become unclean,
species disappear,
and humans are diminished.
In penitence we come to you.

A moment of silence, spontaneous prayer (in big or small groups), music or hymns of repentance or the following prayer for mercy may follow. The prayers may focus on specific suffering in creation. Make sure that local occurrences (i.e animal poaching and other forms of abuse, water pollution, the extinction of species, etc.) of this suffering is highlighted. If possible prepare a PP-presentation from photos taken from your local environment. This can be presented before the prayers begin.

Leader God, have mercy.
All Christ, have mercy.
Leader God, have mercy.

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Reader The scripture for the service is read and followed by a short teaching.

INTERCESSION

One or more of the following prayers may be said.

Leader This we know: the earth does not belong to us.
All The earth is God's and so are all people.
Leader This we know: we did not weave the web of life.
All The earth is God's and so are all that breaths on it.
Leader Whatever befalls the earth
befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.
All The earth is God's and so we will serve it.

Reader Bless all work done today that enables
the human family to be clothed, fed and housed;
to travel and learn wisely,
to communicate and exchange,
to craft and celebrate,
in everything reflecting your glory.

Reader Caring Parent God,
we offer to you the fuels and forests,
the seas and soil,
the air and animals,
the technology and the textiles of the world.
All May we steward your creation to your glory
and for the benefit of future generations.

Reader Worker Christ, as we enter our workplace
may we bring your presence with us.
Equip us to speak your peace and perfect order into its atmosphere.
Remind us to acknowledge your authority over all that will be thought,
decided and accomplished within it.
Give us a fresh supply of truth and beauty on which to draw as we work.
Reader In dependence of the God of life
may we cherish the precious earth:
the earth of the God of life,
the earth of the Christ of love,

the earth of the Spirit Holy.
In dependence on the God of Life
may our life this day have blessing:
the blessing of the God of life,
the blessing of the Christ of love,
the blessing of the Spirit holy.

There may be singing

COMMISSION

Leader Be a gardener.
 Dig a ditch,
 Toil and sweat,
 And turn the earth upside down
 And seek the deepness
 And water the plants in time.
 Continue this labour
 And make sweet floods to run
 And noble and abundant fruits to spring.
 Take this food and drink
 And carry it to God
 As your true worship.

Julian of Norwich

BLESSING

All God, bless the sky that is above us
 the earth that is beneath us,
 Gods image deep within us,
 the day that lies before us. Amen.

Meditation 1

The heavens declare the glory and power of God

Readings: Psalm 19: 2-7, 15 & John 14: 18

Maybe you have wondered about what makes Christianity different from other religions? And what conclusion did you reach?

1. Our Lord God is knowable and with us

One of the biggest disasters that could hit one in his or her upbringing, is that of an absent parent - physically or emotionally. Mom's and Dad's absence will leave you searching and wandering for the rest of your life. Have you seen signs of this restless quest with people you know, or maybe within yourself? This yearning to belong, does not only play a role in individuals, but is also collectively present in communities.

In his famous song "Kinders van die wind" (Children of the Wind) Koos du Plessis sings: "I know an old old song of life's goodness and woes, of wanderers without direction, of seekers who never find, and in the end we all were just children of the wind" – blown here and there.

We, the Christian believers are fortunate not to be "children of the wind". We are not seeking an absent parent. This is not because we are so excellent. But, because this is our God, who do not want to leave us alone. Before his departure from earth Jesus promised his Holy Spirit's presence, assistance, indwelling and care for us in John 14:18. So close, here for us, is our Lord.

The Bible teaches us that our Lord reveals Himself in close proximity with us.

- First, we get to know God in creation as the awesome "Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth". All his works around us tell us of his power and his greatness, and of his general care.
- Second, God shows His love and grace to us in the birth of his Son, his truth and trustworthiness as God, with his kingdom among us, between us.
- Third, the Holy Spirit lives within us, to comfort us, to teach and to lead us.

We are not orphans and we do not grope in the dark. Our great God is at hand, and we live before his face. We can never be grateful enough for this. Therefore we sing together! (*Here or at the end of the meeting appropriate songs can be sung*)

2. Our Lord's creation testifies to his glory and power

(We can safely ask each other: Where, under what circumstances, do you feel very close to God? - *discuss this for a minute*).

Our experience of God and the way we express it, is our spirituality, i.e. our piety. It is the special work of the Holy Spirit which every time gives us special spiritual insights and who uses different

sources for this (cf. Ps 19). John Eldredge speaks of this: "God is Intimately personal with us and He speaks in ways that are peculiar to our own quirky hearts - not just through the Bible, but through the whole of creation". And as he reflects on a 'worldly spirituality', Ernst Conradie describes it as to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. Among the many examples he mentions 'to feel the strength of a wave in the sea; or to think about it that dusk is not the sun that goes down, but the great earth that tilts away for the night ...'. Such observations in the creation leave us with gratitude, with wonder and surprise.

In the first seven verses of Psalm 19 the psalmist David takes us on a brief but vivid journey through the heavens to observe the "power of God" and the "work of his hands, and so to become aware of his greatness and glory.

Against the polytheism of the Canaanite nature religion of the time, creation and the heavens speaks to the poet and to us about our only Creator, about his love and his care. The built-in rhythm, clarity, range and fine balance that strike the careful observer, draws a picture of a God who works masterfully and without comparison. Our Creator and his work is really indescribably wonderful and great [Extracts from the DVD 'Indescribable' of Louie Giglio can be displayed here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNgJhulCrVA>).

3. Our Lord's Son and Spirit comes to live among us

God's Creation Word that causes us and our reality to exist, is completed when His Son, Jesus Christ came to live among us [cf. Hebrews 1: 1]. The book that the Holy Spirit unfolds for us to read, to consult and to take on our life's journey, consists of two chapters: the creation of all things and the coming of Jesus into our reality (incarnation) with his recreation of everything.

It is all too deep for our minds. We only see in part. But as we look at it, ponder about it, try to fathom the scope and the depth of it, we are in a life-changing place about which we are deeply astonished. And at this point, here at the beginning of Pentecost, our Lord who creates and recreates, overwhelms us to pray with the psalmist: "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you o Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." [Ps 19:15]

(Discussion Question: You may have had a nature experience that made a great impression on you. If you did, please share with us how this made you to think differently about *God and yourself*?)

Prayers

- Read Psalm 19: 1-7 or Psalm 148 or together

- Thank God for his miracle working creator heart that does great things, and his personal closeness to each one of us.

- Pray with the psalmist: " May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you o Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

- Pray [silent, or in group prayer] that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes and our hearts at this time to consider and practice environmental care as an essential part of our own spirituality / spiritual life.

Meditation 2

The earth is our and our Lord's dwelling place

Reading: Genesis 1: 26-28, 31; John 1:1-5,14

1. The full gospel

The Gospel is about the salvation of humans. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. The Bible speaks about the redemption of the whole creation. Colossians 1:20 says the redemption that Jesus wrought, implies "all things on earth and in heaven." The Sabbath and the Jubilee in the Old Testament point to God's concern for his creation. The gospel therefore has also to do with the salvation of the world. For the earth is trapped in the evil deeds of people.

It is important that we have to embrace this message in its fullness. For people are killing the earth bit by bit, mainly as a result of our consumer mentality that constantly seeks improvement of our own lifestyles.

Major changes will have to occur in our lives. Alternative energy, protecting the environment and natural resources and appropriate land laws will have to get more attention. We as believers should apply a lifestyle of greater simplicity.

2. The earth is God's creation

Our problem is that we often have a one-sided interpretation of Genesis 1. As if Genesis 1:26 and 28 means: that the Earth should be subjected, be "tamed", exploited and be consumed to its maximum; that everything was created for the sake of us humans; that God is only really interested in our human well-being and salvation; and that creation is but only the background, the decor for the drama that exhibits the redemption of us humans.

We should rather understand "rule" in the sense that we as humans were created to resemble "God's image". This means that we, like God, should deal with nature in a loving, caring and sacrificial way. For in the creation it is about God's own garden!

3. The earth is God's and our dwelling place

John 1 helps us to understand that the earth is God's dwelling place. The Word through whom the world was created, became flesh and made his dwelling among us, with us, as one of us. Our place is also his place.

If we as believers want to help save the earth, we will not only save water and use electricity wisely. We will take the implications into account of the reality that earth is actually God's residence.

Therefore the way that we treat and care for the earth has not only to do with our thinking about global warming, or with actions regarding environmental conservation. This is a deeper issue. Our relationship with the earth actually has to do with our religion, with our Lord himself.

We know that if people hate and abuse and hurt each other, it grieves God, because peace lacks among us as his creatures. Just as well does it sadden God when people abuse the earth, destroy it and deplete it, for the earth belongs to him.

If we understand that God not only made the earth, but that he also resides here with us, we will understand that we are not mere consumers of the earth. We will realize that our responsibility goes further and deeper than just to save the earth for our children.

We actually have a huge responsibility because we love the Lord, and because this earth is his and because it is our and our Lord's residence. The New Testament teaches that Christ will return to the earth at His second coming. We will be with God and forever remain on the new earth under a new heaven. Precisely for this reason the earth should be important to us.

4. What should we do?

For believers, it is about more than just to save electricity and fuel, about the recycling of paper and to cope with less. It goes deeper and is all about our relationship with our Lord, with each other and also with his creation.

It also implies that our religion will not only consist of reading the Bible and praying. As we save electricity and water and recycle our papers and glass, and as we cultivate a simpler lifestyle - we are executing religious acts!

Christians can not only be concerned about the salvation of humans. We should also strive for the redemption of the earth - the earth that God created, the earth in and on which God is present, the earth that is our home ... and the home of the Lord whom you and I worship.

If we love Him we will also love his dwelling place ...

Prayers

- We express our gratitude to God for the beauty of his creation.
- We ask His forgiveness for the destruction of creation because of our greedy consumer mentality.
- We ask wisdom from our Lord to treat his creation in such a way that He will be honoured by it.

Meditation 3

The earth is the Lord's and therefore we appreciate and care for it

Reading: Col. 1: 15-20 (focus on verse 20b)

1. A great song from a prison cell

The praise song, that rejoices about the cosmic (all inclusive) reign of Christ that we just read in Colossians 1, was written from a prison cell... addressed to a broken church, with little insight... living in a broken, incomplete community.... a church caught up in a narrow ditch of short sightedness, with little view on God and life on earth. We are just like the church in Colossians: We get caught up in the narrow ditches of short sightedness, limited understanding... But this song of praise pulls us, as if with a strong rope, out of this narrow ditch, and brings us to a point where we have a clearer faith vision on our Lord and God.

When our faith vision on God is strong, we value the earth and all things on it so that we can again walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him... bearing fruit in every good work... growing in the knowledge of God (Col.1:10)... giving thanks to the Father, Who has qualified and made us fit to share the portion which is the inheritance of the saints.... (Col.1:12).

2. Christ's salvation is also important for the earth

The more the church loses insight in Christ's salvation, the more narrow minded we become about Christ's salvation, the less we understand the implication of our salvation for life on earth. We then also struggle to understand the prayer: "Your Kingdom come. Your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven...." We end up living in two worlds: A spiritual world with a little bit of prayer, a little bit of church going; and an earthly life, where we work, play, struggle and fight to survive. In these two worlds, earth and God are strangers to each other. The earth is to us like a cheap woman whom we abuse and cast aside when used. Since she has no real value to us, other than the satisfaction of our immediate selfish desires.

But this beautiful song of praise, we just read, pulls us out of the ditch of little understanding, to get a clear view on the cross of Christ, also concerning the earth and all things on it.

Let's read verse 20 again: through Christ all on earth and in heaven is reconciled with God.

3. Everything, we too, belong to Christ the Lord

When we get a deep understanding about the salvation in Christ, we will understand that the earth and everything on it, is reconciled with God, it belongs to God, God looks with kind eyes upon the earth, and all upon it. The curse is lifted. God is again walking on the earth in the cool of the evening... they are reconciled again.... God's Spirit came down to be on earth. God makes a temple in the bodies of humans. God does not turn God's back on the earth. God looks with kind eyes unto the earth and all things on it....

In Pentecost we remember the first group of believers gathered in Jerusalem during the feast of the first fruits of the harvest, when the Holy Spirit came down on them. There is a rich symbolism in this: The celebration of the earth's fruits and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who came down to be on earth.

Pentecost says to us: the more we grow in insight about our Salvation in Christ, the more we will respect the earth. The earth with all its goodness belongs to the Lord. It is supposed to be a blessing to all. It is supposed to be respected and cared for by all. Christ made this reconciliation possible. He lifted the curse. He is the exact likeness of the unseen God. He is the Firstborn of all creation. For it was in Him that all things were created, in heaven and on earth...all things were created and exist through Him and in and for Him.

But the same Christ is also the Head of the church. The church is His body, His hands on His earth, that is created for Him. He comes and claims His creation for Himself. Through His blood, He claims back His creation. And He places His church in His creation to lovingly reclaim His ownership over the earth and all that lives in it.

Rejoice, all children of God, because we walk on the soil of our Father's land. It is filled with goodness and blessings. Because it is reconciled with Him. It belongs to Him.

4. The prison song inspires us now, just here...

We did read a song of praise, written in a prison, long time ago, to a church with a narrow minded understanding of Christ's reconciliation. Sometimes this song sounds off-tune as we attempt to sing it. Nevertheless, it pulls us, even today, to a high place of broad faith vision about who Christ really is, and about the earth's real value: The earth and all things living on it is the Lord's property!

Let's reclaim the earth and all upon it, also nature, our soil, our families, our politics, let's reclaim it all as the property of Christ. It was created for Him. It is His, with all the abundance and beauty of it all.

Prayers

- We thank God for his powerful world, and tonight's song from it.
- We confess to Christ that He is indeed the Lord of everything and everyone, even though we may often forget.
- We pray for His strength and grace to be his appreciative and caring representatives, and to establish his reign wherever we may stay, work and play, in his property.

Meditation 4

Our Lord's Spirit reigns in us and gives us insight ...

Readings: Psalm 8; Romans 8: 9-11

1. The Universe – the work of God's fingers...

Many a night David must have marvelled at the beauty of the stars in the sky, while shepherding his father's sheep in the field. It is no wonder that he could write this beautiful hymn on creation. Just look at the sky tonight and experience something of this wonder, of the greatness of God. It's as if God's fingertips gently stroked over the universe, and we can see his fingerprints in the galaxy and in firmament.

2. The place of us humans in creation?

Without all our world's scientific knowledge available to him about the beauty and spaciousness of the cosmos, David wondered and pondered about the place of us humans in this enormous creation of God. What and who is man and woman?

On the one hand he was surprised that the mighty Creator uses children and infants to defend his honour against his opponents.

On the other hand, this "child of man" this "Ben-Adam", (indicating the temporality, earthiness, smallness of humans) is just a little less than a celestial being, with a lot of responsibility.

Look at the four words that David used to indicate the position and assignment of humans in verses 6 and 7.

You have created humans just a little less than heavenly beings

You crowned humans with glory and honour

You let humans have dominion over the works of your hands

You placed humans over everything (domestic animals, wild animals, fish and birds)

The Creator did make humans custodians of nature (*custos naturae*). And the mission of humans is to take great care for creation, and to manage it with special responsibility to God and towards their fellow creatures.

3. We unfortunately miss our goal

How successful are we with this assignment? Is the creation grateful and pleased with this manager that God called? Or does creation groan under the domination of us humans?

Unfortunately, we do see signs of power abuse against and neglect of creation all around us. There are many reasons for this, but let us look briefly at some of them:

- *We humans (think we) are the center of everything (anthropocentrism)*

The Greek philosopher Protagoras long ago wrote: "The people are the measure of all things" Everything revolves around him or her, and they dictate what is done, always only to his or her own advantage.

- *We seek power and domination*

According to Francis Bacon, knowledge and power and therefore the task of science is to force nature to reveal its secret. There is of course a big difference between being dominant and to preserve.

- *We assume that we have inexhaustible sources*

To live and to work as if there will always be clean air, water, regardless of what we do and our impact on the future.

- *We have a consumer mentality*

The life attitude of "I think, therefore I am" has changed to "I consume, therefore I am".

As long as humans can possess and consume, he or she is happy no matter what it requires from the environment or other people.

4. The Spirit of God renews and recreates, also through us ...

If we rightly understand and take seriously the message of Psalm 8, we as Christians will not regard our ecological responsibility as a luxury but as a command of the God whose fingerprints is visible in the sky every night. The question is just how "we" are going to achieve this?

The theme of the World Council of Churches' meeting in Canberra in 1991 expressed our longing and relates to our text from Romans 8: "Come Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation".

Our triune God who right at the beginning created from nothing, is also recreating.

Rom 8: 11 "Because the Spirit of Him (the Father) by whom Jesus was raised from the death lives in you, he (the Father) through whom Christ was raised from the dead, will also give your mortal bodies life through his Spirit that lives in you."

Christ's resurrection is the beginning of the new creation. His spirit that dwells in us, makes it possible for us to live new and differently. We are indeed no longer governed by our sinful nature but by his Spirit.

Now it is also possible for us to participate in the work of the renewal of creation.

We need the wisdom and discernment of the Spirit in our responsibility as stewards of nature (*custos naturae*). At various levels of society we need to change the groaning of creation to a song similar to the praises that Psalm 8 sings to God.

Every believer and every church should preserve that piece of creation that God has placed them in and renew it in his honour.

God planted a little bit of God in you (Romans 5: 5) and in all of creation too (Romans 8: 18-22). We call it the Indwelling Holy Spirit, and it's the part of us that just keeps yearning for God. It is a ticking –life-bomb (Richard Rohr).

Prayers

Today, Father, this blue sky lauds you.
The delicate green and orange flowers of the tulip poplar tree praise you.
The distant blue hills praise you,
together with the sweet-smelling air that is full of brilliant light.
The bickering flycatchers praise you
with the lowing cattle and the quails that whistle over there.

I too, Father, praise you, with all these my brothers,
and they give voice to my own heart and to my own silence.
We are all one silence, and a diversity of voices.
You have made us together,
you have made us one and many,
you have placed me here in the midst
as witness, as awareness, and as joy.

Here I am.
In me the world is present,
and you are present.
I am a link in the chain of light and of presence.
You have made me a kind of center,
but a center that is nowhere.
And yet also I am "here."

Thomas Merton: *Conjectures of a Guilty bystander*

Meditation 5

See Creation and give thanks to the Creator

Readings: Job 38: 1-11, 25-27, 39: 8-11, 29-33, 40:10 - 14, 42: 1-6

1. The Word speaks about the creation

The Bible is full of references to creation. The best known passages are Genesis 1, 6-9 and Ps. 8, Ps. 19 and Ps. 104. Job 38-41 is not that well-known, but is the longest single passage in the Bible talking about creation (129 verses!) It is a beautiful tour of the vast natural world, from the edge of the ocean to the eagle's nest. It tells of light and dark, of rain, snow and gales, of the ibis, crow and

stork, of the lion, antelope and wild donkey and of plants and forests. This poetry lifts you from your home and your city and takes you soaring into the mountains. This anthem to nature is in the form of more than seventy questions.

We first meet Job in chapter 1 as a blameless and upright man who serves God and shuns evil (Job 1: 1,8). Satan then appears on the scene and accuses Job of only serving God because God protects him. The Lord answers Satan: “everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” (1:12). Job, however, has no knowledge of this conversation between God and Satan.

Suddenly, disasters strike Job and his family: First, his oxen and donkeys are captured; then lightning kills the sheep and the shepherds; next the camels are stolen. To make matters worse Job's seven sons and three daughters die in a storm. Job tears his clothes and says, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

Job is personally afflicted with painful sores. His wife's advice is: “Curse God and die!” Job responds: “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

When his friends hear of his disasters, three of them, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar come to show sympathy and condolences and comfort him. They are so shocked by Job's condition that they spend seven days and nights in silence.

Finally they start talking. They try to explain why the pious and sincere Job suddenly is struck by so many disasters. Their position is simple: If someone is suffering, he or she must have sinned. God always punishes sin; if a person is prosperous, it means that they are pious and have been rewarded by God.

The friends' advice for Job is simple: Job, there must be hidden sin in your life - just confess it.

Job cannot accept these easy answers to his misery. He is convinced there is more to his suffering than just punishment for sin. Job does not believe there is a quick fix to every situation and problem. Job's struggle in his crisis is not about the worldly goods and his children that he lost; he feels that in the midst of the crisis he has lost God.

2. Job meets the creatures and their Maker

Job is at his wits end when he calls out: “Oh, if only someone would give me a hearing! I've signed my name to my defense—let the Almighty One answer! I want to see my indictment in writing.” (Job 31:35)

Job has so many unanswered questions. He is upset, but not about the things that he has lost, but about God who is silent.

God then begins to speak in Job 38. God does not take Job to a majestic church building with a tall spire, a wonderful organ and stained glass windows to talk to him there. God takes Job into creation. He takes him into the wild. God exposes Job to nature as never before. God begins to ask questions about creation: Job, were you there when it all was created, when the sea was dammed, when the clouds covered the earth. Job, do you know where the lightning comes from? Job is confronted by question after question about creation, the rain, the lightning, birds, animals, mountains, rivers and swamps. Job do you understand the freedom of the wild donkey or why the vulture builds its nest high up on the cliffs? The question to Job is – when you see it all, do you understand something of the complexity, do you understand anything of the wonder of God, and the extravagance of God's creation? Job, who are you compared to the vastness of the universe?

In these chapters God does not explain to Job why all these terrible things have happened to him. Instead, Job is exposed to the greatness, beauty and extravagance of creation and the Creator.

Job's reaction: Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42: 3-6)

Job reaches a place of peace – but not because of the explanations of his friends. He does not get answers during a sermon or a pastoral counselling session. He finds peace and comfort when God opens his eyes to creation, to nature, the trees, the flowers, the butterflies, the vulture and the hippo. When he realizes how small he is and how great is God, the Creator of the Universe - then he finds peace. Job realizes that just as God takes care of the earth, He has also provided for us mere mortals. Job gets no direct answers from God, but he realizes amidst the play of creation that he is in God's presence. There he finds peace and comfort.

3. To see Creation – and to praise the Creator!

So many people are struggling with questions and challenges of loss like Job, they have suffered from bereavement, from crime or sickness. They are struggling with questions of life. This passage teaches us that we do not only have to find answers in the church or from sermons, or the written scripture. God can speak through nature.

There are things about God that people cannot see—his eternal power and all that makes him God. But since the beginning of the world, those things have been easy for people to understand. They are made clear in what God has made. Rom 1:20

Throughout history people have believed in two types of revelation: "Specific Revelation" - the written word of God and "General revelation" – God revealing himself in Nature. We tend to think that God can only speak to us through the written word through sermons or reading of Scripture and we forget that God also speaks to us through Nature.

Sometimes when we undergo difficulties such as Job of great pain and loss, other people's advice jars on our ears. It does not help to hear other people tell us what they think God is saying to us or to have them quote Scripture to us. These are times when we should follow Job's example and go out into nature. Walk on the beach or through the forest, sit under a tree and pour out your heart to God and God will answer in ways that you can hear. Let the Creator minister to you through His presence in Creation. See creation and praise the Creator!

Prayers

- Thank God for Job's story and its call on us to focus on creation
- Observe creation, see the Creator and give all your struggle, suffering and pain to the Lord.
- Focus on the creation, see the Creator and took courage for today and tomorrow's challenges.

Meditation 6

... To hear his creation's sighs

Reading: Romans 8: 19-22

1. Salvation is for more than humans

The major theme of Romans is: God wants to bring salvation ... God wants to give salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16; Romans 5: 8). Our text in Romans 8 underlines that this salvation is aimed at more than just humans – in fact the Lord is the God of all creation, and therefore the new earth is also part of our Lord's great plan.

2. Creation is in labour

The Apostle tells us that because of the first Adam's disobedience creation also suffers hardship and is groaning in the pains of expecting the birth of the new from the old (creation literally groans and labours with birth pangs "NKJV). Sin not only touched humans in their core. The environment in which we live suffers every day because of our human greed and exploitation through pollution (water, air - toxins, fossil fuel), exploitation of the environment (taking crops from the soil without putting anything back in return or to give the land the necessary rest) (preachers can give more practical examples). Finally, not only we ourselves but also our dwelling place is systematically destroyed and earth becomes a threat to us humans where we feel unsafe. Because, as someone described it: humans are as wolves to other humans ("homo homini lupus est").

3. New people with new eyes, that bring hope

The second Adam (Jesus Christ - cf. Rom 5) brings salvation and new life and new opportunities for us humans - and also for creation (cf. eg John 10:10). New people look with new eyes at the relationships they are in - with God, with self, society and nature. Nature is one up on us – for amid the sighs and pains of expectation nature always shows the signs of hope to us, and do we see the field recovering and the new possibilities. After the cold and death of winter comes the spring with flowers and new leaves, growth and life; after good rains the grass grows to wave shoulder height. We can only practically look at how nature "transforms" itself after a disaster - the new that sprouts after a fire (Practical tip: *Search the internet for photos of the new plants, flowers and shrubs that sprout after the great Western Cape fires in March 2015*); after rehabilitation of wetlands it delivers clean water to the environment; plants and trees that can reduce the carbon footprint (eg the Spekboom in particular). Nature has the ability to actually turn around man's destruction, but we need to assist nature to do so.

4. Come, O Creator Spirit ...

Pentecost is the time of the Holy Spirit - therefore the congregation sighs "come, O Creator Spirit" ("Veni Creator Spiritus"). For the Spirit brings about change, new life, hope in people. Members need practical assistance (empowerment) to live the new hope and to hand it out as part of their calling. It requires that we as Christian believers will reach out to our area (missional; missio Dei) to restore and provide balm for the wounds, just as seriously as we would reach out to lost people. Filled by God's Spirit we should do all we can to recycle, clean up in residential areas, on beaches and along

rivers and to utilize clean and renewable energy. The good news of the Gospel is also meant for mountains, forests, plains, grasses, currents and winds, because the Jesus "the Son came to restore what sin had broken here".

Prayers

- Pray that the Holy Spirit will sensitize the church, its members and leaders to listen well and to hear the sighs of creation - as we are responsible to make a difference in our own immediate environment (e.g. through river cleaning, recycling, planting trees).
- Pray that believers will live in healthy relationships and will be practically involved with "re-creation" – along with neighbours, leaders, authorities and organizations (e.g. municipalities and NGOs working in environmental projects).
- Pray for research institutions that gather information for us to help to be aware of the environment and the changes that occur (eg Animal Demography Unit (UCT) www.adu.org.za that also empowers ordinary people to be ambassadors for biodiversity).

Meditation 7

... To respect the earth's integrity

Reading: Isaiah 45: 1a, 5-8

1. A worldly perspective

We could begin this meditation with the statement that we cannot understand God by looking at the earth, but that we can understand the world by looking at God. The Holy Spirit always takes us back to the Bible, and tells us again and again of the Son and the Father. So the Spirit gives us spectacles through which we can understand the world.

The people of Babylon, in the city where the Israelites were in captivity, did not have the privilege of the Spirit and the Bible. They therefore began looking at the world and then guessed from there how God should be. They saw there was light and darkness, rain and drought, and also other opposing events in nature. It cannot all come from the hand of one God, they said to themselves, and therefore created different gods for the opposite poles of events in the world they knew.

Even today, this happens with us if we ourselves only read and reread those beautiful and comforting texts from the Bible. Then we are so easily impressed by the prosperity promised by God, that we speedily ascribe the opposite to the work of the devil, as if he is some power in the universe alongside God.

2. God alone is the Creator!

The Jews in captivity in Babylon, had to learn that only God is the creator of heaven and earth. The Holy Spirit had to teach them the insight through the prophet that God may act in ways that do not fit in the pictures we have of him. They were so sure that God would save them from captivity by a

Jewish king and Jewish soldiers. The Lord however taught them that He would save them and return them to Jerusalem through a pagan king, Cyrus, that He even called his messiah. This was inconceivable to them!

Therefore God said to them: "I make light and create darkness, I give prosperity and create disaster. I am the Lord, I do all these things." (Isaiah 45: 7). Good and evil in the universe comes from God's hand. They had to use the spectacles that the Holy Spirit gave to them to look at nature and to know that the Creator who creates prosperity and adversity, light and darkness, is able to have His will done in ways that may sometimes puzzle us.

3. Respect for our Creator and his creation is a blessing to all

This does not mean disaster in nature always comes from God's hand. There are calamities that comes from God's hand, but there are also disasters that result from our human abuse of nature. All the smoke and emissions from our cars and factories; all the plastic that we all scatter around; all the water we defile; all of this will eventually lead to major natural disasters in the future. If we understand that this is the Lord's earth, and that we must be careful, we know that we do not have the right to trash and damage the earth.

If we understand God as the only Creator, we will respect nature. And if we respect nature, we respect the Creator of nature. And then our eyes are just open to the unusual way in which our Lord does things, and we are in awe about it. He or she who succeeds in this, always live with the expectation that our Lord will bless and care for us in surprising ways. In turn we, out of our respect for our Lord and his creation, will bless others and care for them.

Prayers

- You are our God, the Chief over all (a few prayers that praise God because God is head of all things).
- Give us eyes of faith (a prayer or two asking that our eyes of faith may be opened to observe the integrity of God's works).
- that we may see, neither good or bad is left to chance: (prayers asking that we in the darkness, the storm, the spider and the snake will recognize God's glorious hand).
- Above our comprehension, our understanding, You hold all that is in position. (Prayers asking the Lord to bless us with the gift to continue to live with wonder and to let live).

Meditation 8

... And to care for the earth

Reading: Genesis 2: 4-15

1. Do-not-care-attitude upsets the artist

During the eighties, Coenie Theys, a member of the URC Bellville and a well-known artist created a precious painting with representations of Table Mountain and the Koeberg power station in the background and a barren landscape - reminiscent of the Knersvlakte in Namaqualand - in the foreground. Artists often make such social commentary. The reading of verse 5 has called forth this spectre of the artist's hand. For it warns us never to have such a do-not-care-attitude as it may mean we literally then pursue an "uncreated earth" (Van Dijk).

As believers and as Church of Christ we in precise and sharp contrast with such an attitude. We confess in the first section of the 12 Articles (Apostolicum) something completely different: "I believe in God, the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth ... " This is our orientation. We are careless, because the earth is the Lord's.

2. The Genesis story focuses on the Creator and his good work

If we read verse 4 literally, and especially if we understand the concept of "history" (NASB) right, we will have a very unnecessary debate about the credibility of the story's content and of the creation story. Because, we are actually dealing with "narrative theology" and not with "scientific history" (D Lawrie). Today we are often fond to level personal questions at this "story theology". "How does this affect me or us? Where do I or we fit in are in this story? "People want to know although their questions may disregard the narrative nature of the text. There are however a few important matters illustrated by the story that we need to ponder:

First we hear clearly the name of our Creator: "Lord God" (NASB; Yahweh Elohim in verses 4,5,6,8,9,15). Experts about the Old Testament say that this name for God helps us to locate the narrative's origin in the time of the Babylonian exile. The new masters in whose land the people of God resided then, described the creation as the work of their own gods. In this context, Israel had to give account of their own faith. Their identity was in fact closely connected to their central confession that the God of Israel is indeed the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Secondly it is striking that all the basic concepts that have to do with land in the Old Testament, "the earth (vv.4,6,7), land (v.5), field crops (v.5), location (V.8) occur in our pericope! The creation story in Genesis with God as the one dealing with the earth and the land brings a host of other subsequent stories of misunderstanding and abuse to the fore, that relates to biblical times and even our own! Our theme and this pericope indeed emphasize that the earth, land, fields and place belong to the Lord himself.

Thirdly the close relationship between humans and the earth, is brought forward through a beautiful sound game in the original language. Earth (adamah) and hu-man (Adam) are actually related, and together we are the property of our Creator God. Our Lord Himself is creative in acts of planting (v.8)

and "growth" (v.9). He also gives people a place in the garden (v.8). The Lord "picks and sets up" (verse 15) and he commands (verse 15). He created partnerships and determine our relationships.

In the fourth place a significant part of our text for tonight's meditation is the narrative about the river that was divided into four streams (vv.10-14). The original notation suggests that the river is perennial! Water, the source of life is to be shared! The express purpose of the river was to water the Garden, the home, the food place (V.10). Everybody and everything was to be cared for and should share God's care.

3. Our relation with Mother Earth is really a matter of faith

Finally the writing of verse 15 indicates the express purpose for the humans presence in this Garden: To to till it (the earth) and to to preserve it. Before the Land of promise, "spewed" the people of God (Lev. 18: 25.28) into the exile, they were taught by the Lord himself to effectively cultivate the land (Isaiah 28: 23-29).

According to our text our interaction with Mother Earth, therefore has everything to do with our own created being, our faith, our responsibility, and with our own future existence here! In short, you and I are faithful "people with an ecological responsibility" (Van Dijk). God's goal with our creation was to help preserve God's broader creation and to share it responsibly with one another.

Prayers

- We begin tonight with ourselves. Let us pray tonight for love of ourselves as God's creatures (according to Matt. 22: 37-40), because, as some interact with our Mother Earth - our life source, our livelihood - it looks as if we do not love ourselves and our descendants!
- Let us pray for all involved in land and food security: producers, workers, governments. Let us also pray for work, employment and crafts (For example, think of the Project: Farming God's Way [Wwww.farming-gods-way.org] or Foundations for Farming.
- Let us pray for the reversal of the negative effects of globalization on access to healthy food.
- Let us pray for the preservation of the earth and endangered plant and animal species. Global warming and the availability / effective management of water [Fortunately, the proposed search for natural gas in the Karoo temporarily halted. We have reason to praise and pray the Holy Spirit to keep us ecologically responsible!]

Meditation 9

... To be generous with and serving our fellow creatures

Reading: 2 Cor 9: 10-15

(A practical tip: For the meditation parishioners can share the pain and distress of others locally, nationally and internationally. Then read 2 Corinthians 9 and do the meditation. After the meditation

allow the congregants to tell each other how they will address the needs of people locally, nationally and internationally. Let them pray for fellow humans in need.)

1. We live in a selfish society

We live in a selfish society, filled with self-interest,

If we have to help others we always ask: What do I get out of it? How will I benefit by giving something to others? Rich people ask: Is there tax relief if I make a donation? Businesses ask: Will I get publicity and exposure? "How many miles will we get out of it?" Would it help to achieve our social responsibility targets? Churches ask: Will others see our website and Facebook page?

We live in a society that is not very merciful. Each one for him / herself. And we want to know why are the people who need assistance in their particular situation. Is it perhaps their own fault? we like to ask. And people are willing to give, as long as it is not asking too much of them.

2. God's Spirit wants a different mindset from us

In contrast to this selfish spirit of our time the Holy Spirit of God creates us to care for our fellow humans. We read about this in Acts 6 where the Greek-speaking widows had needs and seven deacons were appointed to minister to them. Structurally, the church is organized to be a caring community for the needy in the neighbourhood.

But not only those with whom the church or congregation has daily contact need our care. Paul brought the situation of fellow believers in Jerusalem, to the attention of the church in Corinth. We, the church may never function from the premise, "out of sight, out of mind". Paul writes about these needs in a letter and he teaches Christians to think differently from the world around them.

But why differently? Christians should remember that what they possess comes from the hand of the Lord. Verse 10 says, "God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also give you seed and let it grow, and will give produce a rich harvest from your generosity. While we may work hard to earn "our" money, Christians see it coming from our Lord's hand. He gives us opportunities and health. He asks of us to be and to live gratefully!

3. God asks us to be generous to fellow creatures in their distress

A person who is thankful that God had given to him or her, should show gratitude to God. We show our gratitude to God by being compassionate to our fellow humans in need. In the prophetic discourse in Matthew 25, we read the famous parable of the sheep and the goats. Verse 40 says: And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to Me."

Compassion and generosity towards others in need is the touchstone of our faith.

4. Our willingness to serve, brings glory to God and makes the gospel credible

When we are generous towards others in need, God is praised. Paul writes:

12 For this service you perform not only meets the needs of God's people, but also produces an outpouring of gratitude to God.

13 And because of the proof which this service of yours brings, many will give glory to God for your loyalty to the gospel of Christ, which you profess, and for your generosity in sharing with them and everyone else.

5. Our generosity also allows people to pray for us

When we are generous towards others in need people become grateful and they also then talk with the Lord about us. They thank God for His abundant grace toward us and also pray that God will bless us, as they give all the glory to God, who in the gift of His Son Jesus to us, the supreme example of generosity.

Paul himself puts it as follows: 14. And so with deep affection they will pray for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown you. 15 Let us thank God for his priceless gift!

Prayers

- We thank our Lord for His unspeakable gift, and abundance in Jesus Christ to us.
- We pray that our Lord who favours us with all blessings and gifts will also give us the attitude to from our very nature be of service and generous.
- We pray for the resources and opportunities to serve God and our fellow humans with the gifts we receive from God.

Meditation 10

... to share and to live in simplicity and austerity

Readings: Acts 2: 43-47; 4: 32-37; 2 Cor 8: 10-15

(For background: The church in Jerusalem in the time of Acts 2 and 4 along with the rest of the people experienced financial progress. The abundance that they had, they could easily share with other believers around them. Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 8 that the situation in Jerusalem drastically changed and that a tremendous need arose among the Christians in Jerusalem.

He therefore called on all the others who had resources at their disposal, to share with the church in Jerusalem. The churches in Achaia and Macedonia were recovering from a civil war in which these two provinces requested Emperor Tiberius for a waiver of tax. The situation of the two are in complete contrast, for the Christians in Jerusalem did give form abundance, while the rest of the churches in Achaia and Macedonia, whom Paul later requested to help the Jerusalem believers, did not have such abundance. But according to 2 Corinthians 8: 3 they were willing to contribute more than their share. They even contributed from their own shortage and poverty.)

1. Give yourself to the Lord

The common principle in both the situations of the faithful in the different congregations is contained in 2 Corinthians 8: 5 and 9. If verse 5 becomes reality in our own lives then we are capable to ask for God's will for our life. One of the ways God will answer, is to open our eyes so we can see the need and can offer assistance, in order to restore balance. If we do this we honour Him and we express his caring love. As in the case with the manna, this asks of us to put our trust in God. The examples in the congregations show us what to do. Compare 2 Corinthians 8: 6 for example, where Titus gave his time as an organizer and the churches of their time, skills and resources. It should inspire us to act in the footsteps of these churches.

2. Give to each other according to the wealth you have received in Christ

Part of the wealth we received, is our salvation, but also our skills, resources and time. The Christians in the Book of Acts owned properties and they shared it in love and unity with each other. It was so different from the lifestyle and attitude many of us have today; we separate and isolate ourselves when we are rich in possessions. They however, moved closer to each other. Their lifestyle resulted in attracting non-Christians towards them (Acts 2:27). Having the right attitude, you sometimes even give more than your ability or capacity is. The Holy Spirit leads you to make your skills, your resources and your time, which God entrusted you with, available for the enhancement of his kingdom.

3. Restoring the balance (2 Cor 8:13-15)

Paul used the reality of needs that shifts from one place to another, as was the case with the Jerusalem congregations, to show that we might be able to help restoring the balance. He referred to Exodus 16:18, where it was about God's care through the provision of manna. God provides for everybody and if we are prepared to share, nobody will be in need. It however requires trust in God's providence.

This passage also reprimands those who are too lazy to work. If they did not rise early every day to go and pick up food, they would not have food. The test to Israel was if they would trust God every day to provide for the next day, or if they rather would, because of their fear about tomorrow, pick up more food than what they were allowed to. Do we not detect anguish about tomorrow in those just wanting to gather wealth? The expression: "grab while the opportunity lasts" can indeed result in abusing the earth. We have the responsibility to strive for balance by giving from our abundance to those who possess little or nothing. The problem is that people never think they have too much. Our mutual fellowship and love may help us to look with new eyes at our possessions and the needs of those around us. This passage on manna is speaking to all of us who are putting our trust in our own abilities, who only want to gather for ourselves and who are therefore destroying the resources of the earth.

4. Do you live from abundance or from poverty?

The earth belongs to the Lord, but the earth and us who inhabit the earth are getting deeper and deeper into serious trouble because of our excessive ways of living. The daring question is: how are you going to give yourself to God? From your abundance or from your poverty? Are you willing to seek the will of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to do what God requires, in order to restore the balance on earth?

All of us received from God particular gifts: gifts of time, abilities and various resources that we can avail in restoring the balance. It is however important to do that with a pure heart (remember Ananias and Sapphira)

The Holy Spirit is calling us to trust God in believing that if we are willing to share God's gifts with one another, there will be enough for us all. Our responsibility towards one another and the earth compels us to serve one another and the earth with what we have received from the Lord. In Southern Africa, the gap between rich and poor is of the highest in the world. Particularly because of this gap, we as church should work hard in order to restore the balance.

The earth gave from its abundance so that we can live sustainable. Through this we experience God's blessing and love. But we abused this abundance, therefore the resources of the earth are being exhausted. We just cannot continue with this way of life. It is now time to give back from our abundance, to consume less and to share more. If we do that, we live sacrificially and open-handed.

The sustainability of creation and our stewardship are causes for alarm. As the manna has been enough for one day (when it was collected according to proper needs) and people had to learn to trust God for the next day, in the same way God is still providing today – enough for all people on earth. If only we can learn to share with one another! The church has the responsibility to set an example and lead others to God.

How do you live? Where can you make changes? On what are you focusing?

The earth belongs to God	or	the earth belongs to consumer culture
On others and creation	or	on myself and my desires
To give	or	to receive
On healthy and happy relations	or	on material things that bring happiness
On rest	or	on rushing to be the best
To put back	or	to take out
On service and humility	or	on winning, power and status
On less and caring	or	on more and abuse
On meaningfulness and listening	or	on success and achievements
On gratitude and contentment	or	on pretence and greed
On appreciation and amazement	or	on abuse and consuming

Prayers

- Gratitude for the wealth we received with and in Christ and for all his blessings we may live from.
- Confession and laying down of our wrong attitudes of or focuses on greed and desire, striving to be the best, taking out without putting back, on power and status, on abuse and make-believe, on greed and consummation.
- Pray for a life orientation of appreciation and wonderment, of compassion and responsibility, of service to and care of creation.

Meditation 11 - Pentecost

We confess the earth is the Lord's and we honour his lordship with all of creation

Reading: Psalm 24: 1-10

1. Our resurrected Lord recreates the feast!

It is Pentecost!

We remember that 50th day after the Passover in Jerusalem. It was the culmination of the Feast of the seven weeks (Ex 34:22, 2 Cron 8:13), during which Israel remembered their exodus from slavery (Lev 23). For them this climax to the Feast of the seven weeks was a joyous celebration, a day of thanksgiving and they brought the first fruits of their harvests as sacrifice and took a break from their daily toil. It was this festive occasion that the resurrected Jesus turned into the feast of Pentecost. On this festive day, our Lord poured out his Holy Spirit on his disciples.

In Acts 2 Luke tells us how on that day, ordinary men and women were filled with the power of God, with remarkable results. The once scared disciples stood in front of a crowd of religious Jews – “from every nation under heaven” – and in all languages, they witnessed to Jesus the Resurrected Lord and to the fact that his Spirit is working powerfully, as Joel 2 prophesied. The disciple Peter was changed into a new person and he could explain the gospel to all. About 3000 persons were added to the community of believers on that day.

God's Spirit opened their hearts and minds and empowered them with courage and wisdom to go into the whole wide world, proclaiming the coming of the kingdom everywhere and to everybody and working for its realisation.

2. Our Lord recreates the context

We find an important Christian confession in the words of Songs of Sion nr 126:1 (Sionsgesang 126:1 – translated)

“Jesus Christ rules as King
He's been glorified by his enthronement
and clothed with majesty.
All authorities, powers,
sovereignties, mighty thrones
must praise and honour Him.”

Psalm 24 is also such a song of confession. In the church calendar, it is traditionally sung during Advent (Christ's coming to this earth, when he laid down his power to become one with us) or when Jesus' ascension into heaven is celebrated (the event where Christ again took up his power on the right hand side of his Father).

The poet of Psalm 24, traditionally accepted to be King Dawid, confesses that the earth, and all that dwell on it, belong to the Lord. He created the earth, building it on the sea and the rivers. Scholars link David's confession of God's sovereignty to the entrance of the arc (symbol of God's presence) into Jerusalem. David and his co-leaders learned from the pain of Ussah's tragic death (2 Sam 6:1-15)

what God actually expected from them. The Owner of “the earth and everything in it” expects from us an attitude and practice of life that respect and honour Him above all.

Our Lord is seeking communion with you and me, He is expecting praise and worship, he is longing for our servitude and love. The Lord wants us to build his kingdom, always, everywhere, with everything we have. But in this process, like with David and his people then, God wants us to have clean hands (that will compassionately work towards goodness and justice for the sake of our neighbours and the earth) and with pure hearts (loving God and each other in the core of our existence), without deceit or deception (credible and trustworthy). The Psalm ends with exuberant jubilation because of the kingship of our Lord (7-10). His presence amongst them changes the City of David (his kingdom) into the City of God (God’s own property). There is hope!

3. We honour his reign!

Psalm 89 is Ethan the Ezrahite’s poem, dedicated to future generations, on our Lord's love and trustworthiness, and about the heaven and the earth and all in it that is belonging to Him who created it (12-13). In his vision about the servant of God, on whom his Spirit would come in order to reveal God's will to all nations, Isaiah also confesses that our Lord made the earth and all in it, and that He is giving life to mankind and to all that is moving (42:5 -6). James is also teaching us that the Father created all the light bearers (planets and stars) of heaven (1:16-18).

On the day of Pentecost, the newly empowered believers eventually learned that they are also included in the “all” that belongs to God. They also learned how they are included in all that is owned by God. In I Cor 3:21-22 Paul is explaining that, instead of accepting the screwed perceptions and practices of those who think everything belongs to them, they should rather realise that they belong to Christ and Christ to God the Father.

This is just as true for us. We belong to the resurrected One, the living Lamb. Even today, his Holy Spirit is working in and through us. The Spirit is filling us with new life. The earth in which we dwell, belongs to Him, it is His creation. It does not belong to us, neither does it belong to earthly kings or economic institutions or military authorities. No! The earth, the creation, us, everything belongs to our Lord! We are all extremely privileged to live here and now – today - and to allow others to live, keeping tomorrow in sight. Responsible, in his Name and honouring his reign!

Prayers

Leader: Lord, resurrected Jesus Christ, your Pentecostal congregation confesses with the whole of creation, with all that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, yes, together with all that exists: “To him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Revelations 5:13)

All: Creator Lord, you are the maker of all that exist, from the infinite firmament to the most humble ant. You give life to all the living. You are elevated above all of creation, our Creator, Provider and Lord.

Leader: The creation, together with the earth, is in deep pain, looking and longing for your children, those who worship you as Owner, who know your heart, who respect and honour the works of your hands and who care for and protect it.

All: Creator God, give us ears to hear the song of praise coming from your heavens. Give us insight to understand that the earth is our, but also your dwelling place. Teach us how you, as Reconciler, rule the earth with a soft yoke and a light burden, compassionately.

Leader: Holy Spirit that dwells in us, guides and leads us, please give us insight to recognise your creation as yours and to worship you, with lives that are overflowing with compassion and justice.

All: Lord Jesus, we hear the groans of your creation, we see the suffering of your earth. We want to live a sacrificial, generous and serving life, soberly and in simplicity, with a light footprint, following your example. Give us what we need to achieve this.

Leader: You became one with us, in Christ. Through the Spirit of Jesus, you re-create all that exist. You heal all that sin has broken. You have deep insight and take deceivers into your service again (Ps 24). You do not break the cracked reeds, you do not quell the dim lamp-wicks, but you make us a light that shines for the nations (Isaiah 42) and a comfort and joy for the earth.

All: Come, creator Spirit, renew us, your earth, yes, your whole creation! Amen.