



Week Three

**JESUS
THE
CENTRE & HEART
OF ALL CREATION**

*A*nd it was good



JESUS - THE CENTRE & HEART OF ALL CREATION

As we journey through Lent – a season in which we seek to draw closer to Jesus in his suffering and passion – we ask how ‘creation’ as experienced in different parts of our world, can offer us new insights into these central mysteries of our faith.

Bible Exploration

Colossians 1.9-29

At the heart of this passage (1.15-20) is a lyrical hymn of praise in honour of Jesus Christ who is the heart of creation. The words and phrases used deliberately remind us of the beginning of the Book of Genesis. There is a ‘play’ on the Hebrew word *Reshith* with which Genesis begins. (*It is translated in Genesis 1.1 as ‘beginning’.*) The word *Reshith* itself is closely related to the Hebrew word *Rosh* – which means *head*.

So in verse 18 the writer of Colossians seeks to exploit and list all the possible meanings of *Rosh/Reshith: head, beginning, firstborn, first place* (NRSV translation). It was a way of saying that Jesus Christ summed up every possible aspect of Genesis 1.1!

To explore the meaning of words in this way is a traditional Jewish way of interpreting scripture. Many of the writers of the New Testament were well versed in Jewish traditions of biblical interpretation. But it is clear from the following verses that the focus on Christ at the centre and head also has implications for all of us – if Christ is the *head* then we too are part of the *body*. And just as today we see creation suffering, so Paul saw himself as sharing in that, as a member of the *body* (verses 23-24). The Christ we proclaim to everyone (verse 26) is the *one through whom God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross* (verse 20).

Mark 4.30-41

The importance of creation is a motif which runs through Mark 4. The processes of growth which form part of the natural cycle

of creation are repeatedly used as a symbol of God's kingdom. So we hear of a sower sowing seed – and the varied results that spring from that. We hear of seed scattered and growing without any attention, and finally of the marvellous mustard seed – so tiny yet becoming big enough to offer shade and blessing to other parts of God's creation.

In telling these parables, Jesus does not focus upon himself (*although he probably alludes to himself when he speaks of the work of the sower, Mark 4.3*). Instead, his focus is on the kingdom or reign of God. But who Jesus is, and his role in relation to creation, lies at the heart of the story which follows, describing what happens when Jesus and his disciples cross the Sea of Galilee in a storm (4.35-41). The terrified disciples call upon Jesus to calm the storm – but when he does they are awe-struck. For the Old Testament (*especially the book of Exodus*) had taught them that God alone can control the sea. So the chapter ends with a question *Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?* (4.41) Mark does not answer this question – at least not straight away. It can, however, be discovered as we read on in this Gospel and are prompted to make our own response to Jesus.

What is it that makes a bridge between these two very different parts of Mark 4 – the stories of seed and then the calming of the storm? At a recent international meeting in Jamaica, a preacher from the Caribbean (*West Indies*) drew out a fascinating and challenging link. The end of the parable of the mustard seed speaks of the way God's kingdom bears fruit – and is immediately followed by Jesus' encouragement to his disciples *Let us go over to the other side* (4.35). This means the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a Gentile region, culturally and religiously different to Jesus' Jewish homeland near Capernaum. The preacher in Jamaica suggested that this contains an important message – if the Kingdom is to fully flourish it cannot remain static. Disciples of Jesus then and now are called to *'cross over to the other side'*, to encounter difference and to move outside their comfort zones. And in doing so, they will find the power of Christ travelling with them in perhaps surprising ways.

Reflection

The picture by Sarah Prentice is a marvellous portrayal of the 'mustard seed' parable.

But at the same time she makes clear the interconnection of all creation.



Reading the Bible with Anglicans around the World

The story of the ministry and death of Jesus Christ is our central focus as we journey through Lent. Yet if Jesus is at the heart of creation, as our biblical readings this week suggest, how is our faith affected when Lent looks and feels very different in different parts of our world? Historical movements have led to the pattern of the European northern hemisphere's seasons shaping the way that the Church has thought of the spiritual 'seasons' of the Christian year. For example many Christmas carols link the birth of Christ to 'the bleak midwinter'.

In fact the word **Lent** actually comes from an Anglo-Saxon word that means **spring**. There is a traditional Lenten hymn that explicitly proclaims:

*Lent comes in the spring,
And spring is pied with brightness;
The sweetest flowers,
Keen winds, and sun, and showers
Their health do bring
To make Lent's chastened whiteness.*

But it is interesting to 'cross over' and discover how the different seasons in other parts of the world can affect and enrich our understanding of Lent.

The following reflection by Bosco Peters, an Anglican priest in New Zealand, describes how it feels to experience Lent in the non-tropical parts of the southern hemisphere.

'Lent in this (southern) hemisphere heralds the autumn. Nature pares down to her essentials. She carries with her the seeds of the future. She concentrates her energies on the one thing necessary, that life may be renewed when the globe turns once more towards the sun. Gardeners do their essential tidying and preparation. We plant our bulbs, hoping for new life in the future.'

We, the church, also pare down in Lent. Lent focuses on the essentials: the new life in the death and resurrection of Jesus and our participation in this through our faith and baptism. After the busyness of the summer there is a time to learn to pause. We Christians can plant some bulbs together, praying that through our celebration of Lent new life may spring up in our community and throughout the world.

In modern liturgy the penitential flavour is now more concentrated on Ash Wednesday. Creation all around us is beginning to die. Nature seems to echo the ancient words addressed to each person at the imposition of ashes which marks the beginning of Lent: Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

These forty days, approximately a tenth of the year, are our tithe of the year. Our personal Lenten disciplines, however, are not just another self-improvement course. They are to prepare us for a party, the party of Easter ...

The stark simplicity of Lenten worship can provide a striking contrast with the joyful celebration of Easter ... To grow closer to Christ we need to take time to reflect and pray. The danger of Lent is that it tends to be the church's busiest time as we add extra services and study on top of our full parish programme. In the gospel of the first Sunday of Lent we go with Jesus into his forty days in the desert. Our times at church and the Lenten programmes can be oases in the desert, encouraging us on to that intimacy with God and a realistic examination of ourselves which the desert promises.'

Questions for Discussion

1. What do the links between Colossians 1 and the beginning of Genesis suggest to us about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New?
2. In our study of Mark's Gospel we noticed that by linking two different episodes together we can discover something new. How far is it important, when reading the Bible, to look at a passage in its context – noting what comes before and afterwards?
3. How much is our celebration of the church's year and our reading of the Bible influenced by the seasons where we live?
4. What does the Sarah Prentice picture say to you about creation?



Sharing our Insights

What do you want to share with fellow Anglicans as a result of your study and discussion?



Are there comments you wish to feed back into the Bible project? You may wish to do this directly via the Anglican Communion website or email them to the Bible project coordinator. For further details turn to this section in Week Five.

Closing Prayers

Gloria

Glorious are you, Mystery of Life,
essence of all creation.

You are the symphony of stars and planets.

You are the music of the atoms within us.

You are the dawn on mountain peaks,
the moonlight on evening seas.

Forest and farm, the rush of the city,
everything is embraced in your love.

We rejoice as we sing our gratitude.



Week Three

Glorious are you, O Jesus Christ,

Cosmic love in human flesh.

You graced the smallness of time and place
to teach us to dance to the music.

You walk on our seas and heal in our streets.

You make your home in our lives,
revealing that cross and resurrection
are one on the road to freedom.

We rejoice as we sing our gratitude.

Glorious are you, O Spirit of Truth,

wisdom and breath of our being.

You are the wind that sweeps our senses.

You are the fire that burns in our hearts.

You are the needle of the inner compass,
always pointing to true North,
guiding us on the sacred dance
into the Mystery of Life.

We rejoice as we sing our gratitude.

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All-embracing God,

We thank you that your good news – that life conquers death

And faith overcomes fear –

Is for the whole creation,

And not for humankind alone.

We thank you that the universe itself –

Suffering now as if in the pangs of childbirth –

Waits with us, in eager expectation of deliverance,

And looks forward to a new freedom

From pain and frustration,

Torture and abuse.



And it was good

Week Three

We thank you that your promise to reconcile
The whole cosmos to yourself
Began to be realised in the self-giving of Christ,
Whose cross stretches from earth to heaven,
Gathering up the wounds of the universe
And offering them as harbingers of the resurrection.

We thank you for the shining dream
Of a new heaven and a new earth,
Where you will be seen at last
As undergirding, permeating and transforming all things.
In the light of that vision, may we live together now
With hospitality and gentleness, longing and love.

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