

Week One: The Hope of Something New

Bible Exploration Isaiah 11. 1-9 and Mark 1. 9-15



Questions for Discussion

1. What do you understand by 'new creation'? How do you understand the hope expressed in Isaiah for the harmony of all creatures? How far does your understanding about 'new creation' link to the way you read the Bible? In what ways does the experience of Christians in the Sudan inform your understanding?
2. In what ways do you think that the hope for a 'new creation' is linked to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (cf 2 Corinthians 5: 14-17)? What does this suggest about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New?
3. What does it mean for you to read these biblical passages as Anglicans in your contemporary context?
4. What do you think about the comment made by Anglicans in Sudan – that biblical commentators who exclude the possibility of miracles should not be trusted?

Closing Prayer

Let us encourage our hearts in the hope of God
Who once breathed the breath of life into the human body.
God's ears are open to prayers;
The Creator of humankind is watching;
The Lord reigns from his high place, seeing the souls of those who die.
Turn your ears to us: upon whom else can we call?
Is it not you alone, O God? Let us be branches of your Son.

*(Mary Alueel Garang,
Episcopalian Christian of the Diocese of Bor, Sudan)*

Bible Exploration for Week Two Genesis 1. 1-2. 25 and Jeremiah 4. 11-28

Week Two: Our Place in the Created Order

Bible Exploration Genesis 1. 1-2.25 and Jeremiah 4. 11-28

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the fact that the Bible begins with creation suggest to you about the nature and purpose of the Bible?
2. How far do you take the pictures of the relationship between human beings and creation given in Genesis 1 and 2 as normative for us today? To what extent is your view affected by whether or not you think creation 'happened' exactly as described in these chapters?
3. The notes on Jeremiah say that the prophet suggests 'there is an intrinsic connection between the earth, the creatures, the health of the land and the spiritual and moral condition of people, especially God's people'. Do you think this is true? How comfortable are you in reading the parts of the prophetic books in the Bible that link disaster and human behaviour?
4. The reflection from South Africa commented on the difficulty of relating to the parts of the Bible, such as Deu-

Closing Prayer

Holy God, Creator and Lover of all that is,
we confess to you that we have sinned.
We have failed in our care for the land and its creatures,
we have been greedy, destructive, and wasteful
of the resources you entrusted to us.

Polluted air and water,
eroded soil and salty earth,
birds and animals deprived of habitat,
and neighbours left hungry and thirsty by our selfishness:
all these cry out against us.
We do not know how to restore what we have damaged,
and we repent in sorrow and distress.

Forgive us, we pray, and have mercy.
Give us grace to change our ways,
to make amends,
and to work together for the healing of the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The priest pronounces this Absolution:

Our Saviour died and rose again
so that for all who live in him
there is a new creation.
Therefore I declare to you:
your sins are forgiven,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Send out your Spirit, O Lord.

Renew the hearts of your people.

Renew the face of the earth.

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Bible Exploration for Week Three Colossians 1. 9-29 and Mark 4. 30-41

Week Three: Jesus The Centre & Heart of All Creation

Bible Exploration Colossians 1. 9-29 and Mark 4. 30-41

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?

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.

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.

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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Week Four: Creation Blesses the Lord

Bible Exploration Psalm 104

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways do we need to learn to live more in harmony with 'times and seasons' than is the case in the Western world at the moment? What might this mean for our life-styles?
2. How far can or should we learn from indigenous, pre-biblical cultures in our attitude to creation? Does the fact that Psalm 104 draws on non-Israelite mythology offer an example for us?
3. Does the fact that the '*Benedicite*' comes from the Apocrypha mean that we read it differently to texts that come from the Old and New Testaments? Does the fact that we can find it in the Book of Common Prayer make any difference to how we use it?
4. '*Sacred truth—that is, about the universe and about God's relation to creation—needs all four directions. It has a necessary complexity that implies an interpretive humility. This approach to truth is also applied to Scripture.*' How far do you agree with this comment about the need for an '*interpretive humility*' in relation to scripture?

Closing Prayers

A hymn from Australia

*Where wide sky rolls down and touches red sand,
where sun turns to gold the grass of the land,
let spinifex, mulga and waterhole tell
their joy in the One who made everything well.*

*Where rain-forest calm meets reef, tide and storm,
where green things grow lush and oceans are warm,
let every sea-creature and tropical bird
exult in the light of the life-giving Word.*

*Where red gum and creek cross hillside and plain,
where cool tree-ferns rise to welcome the rain,
let bushland, farm, mountain-top, all of their days
delight in the Spirit who formed them for praise.*

*Now, people of faith, come gather around
with songs to be shared, for blessings abound!
Australians, whatever your culture or race,
come, lift up your hearts to the Giver of grace.*

May be sung to PADERBORN
© Elizabeth J. Smith 1956-

The Song of the Three Young Men / Prayer of Azariah

Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

Bless the Lord you heavens: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

*Bless the Lord you angels of the Lord: • bless the Lord all you his hosts;
bless the Lord you waters above the heavens: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*Bless the Lord sun and moon: • bless the Lord you stars of heaven;
bless the Lord all rain and dew: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*Bless the Lord all winds that blow: • bless the Lord you fire and heat;
bless the Lord scorching wind and bitter cold: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*Bless the Lord dews and falling snows: • bless the Lord you nights and days; bless
the Lord light and darkness: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*Bless the Lord frost and cold: • bless the Lord you ice and snow;
bless the Lord lightnings and clouds: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*O let the earth bless the Lord: • bless the Lord you mountains and hills;
bless the Lord all that grows in the ground: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*Bless the Lord you springs: • bless the Lord you seas and rivers;
bless the Lord you whales and all that swim in the waters: • sing his praise and
exalt him for ever.*

*Bless the Lord all birds of the air: • bless the Lord you beasts and cattle;
bless the Lord all people on earth: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*O people of God bless the Lord: • bless the Lord you priests of the Lord;
bless the Lord you servants of the Lord: • sing his praise and exalt him for ever.*

*Bless the Lord all you of upright spirit: • bless the Lord you that are holy and
humble in heart.*

*Bless the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: • sing his praise and exalt him for
ever.*

*Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England (2000)
(including the Psalter as published with Common Worship)*

Week Five: Creation Groans in Painful Hope

Bible Exploration Romans 8. 12-27 and 2 Peter 3. 1-13

Questions for Discussion

1. How important for you is our faith that **nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus** at times of catastrophe? In what ways does Paul's claim that the Spirit prays for us in our weakness offer you comfort and support?
2. How do you respond to the depiction of '**the day of the Lord**' in 2 Peter? What problems does it raise? What hope does it offer? What can we learn from 2 Peter about how we should or should not interpret scripture? What are the criteria and assumptions you use?
3. We have noticed the way that one way of using the scriptures is as key resources for worship (*without seeking to 'explain' them*). How far do you think it is appropriate to use the Bible in such ways – or is it avoiding the challenge?
4. Looking back over these five studies, how do you think creation might be **redeemed** (as Romans 8.21 suggests)? Consider how your responses may shape the way you approach Holy Week, and affect our lifestyles as Christian people.



Closing Prayers

(Written at the time of the Asian Tsunami in 2004)

*Where were you God?
Where were you when the ocean broke the shore?
**I was playing on the beach.
Fishing in my boat.
Eating breakfast with my family.***

*Where were you when the sea sucked lives away?
**I was holding on tight until I couldn't.
Afraid and running.
Caught in the swirling chaos.***

*Where were you when all those people died?
**I was struggling to breathe.
Letting go.
Counting the lights entering eternity.***

*Where were you when the waters receded?
**I was standing on the shore.
Weeping with grief.
Aching to hold my lost people.***

*Where were you in the days that followed?
**I was searching and hoping.
Burying the dead.
Seeking shelter, food and comfort.***

*Where are you now God, where are you now?
**I am where you are.
Always.***

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