

Welcome and Call to worship

Opening question

For most of us, our lives are lived in a fairly defined area. We don't travel far and we shape our world to suit us. But sometimes we go out – maybe on holiday – to much larger places, where we have less control. Have you been anywhere where you have suddenly felt very small?

Our Bible reading is from the Book of Job; Chapter 38 We will listen to it once and leave a time for quiet personal reflection.

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

4 “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?

Tell me, if you understand.

5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

6 On what were its footings set,

or who laid its cornerstone—

7 while the morning stars sang together

and all the angels^[a] shouted for joy?

8 “Who shut up the sea behind doors

when it burst forth from the womb,

9 when I made the clouds its garment

and wrapped it in thick darkness,

10 when I fixed limits for it

and set its doors and bars in place,

11 when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther...

12 “Have you ever given orders to the morning,

or shown the dawn its place,

13 that it might take the earth by the edges

and shake the wicked out of it?

16 “Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea

or walked in the recesses of the deep?

17 Have the gates of death been shown to you?

Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness?

18 Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?

Tell me, if you know all this...

22 “Have you entered the storehouses of the snow

or seen the storehouses of the hail,

23 which I reserve for times of trouble,

for days of war and battle?

24 What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed,

or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?

25 Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain,

and a path for the thunderstorm,

26 to water a land where no one lives,

an uninhabited desert,

27 to satisfy a desolate wasteland

and make it sprout with grass?

31 “Can you bind the chains^[b] of the Pleiades?
Can you loosen Orion’s belt?

32 Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons^[c]
or lead out the Bear^[d] with its cubs?..

34 “Can you raise your voice to the clouds
and cover yourself with a flood of water?

35 Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?

We hear it a second time. After this reading, share phrases or verses which have had an impact on you. Do not explain why they are important to you, just say the words.

We hear it a third time. This time, following the reading we will share what the impact was of the words we have heard.

Job has been struck by many terrible disasters. This was because Satan asked God for permission to test him, because he was sure that Job’s faithfulness to God was just because he’d had an easy life, living comfortably and with a large and loving family surrounding him. Take all that away, Satan thought, and then we’ll see just how much he trusts God! God had faith in Job, and he allowed Satan to test him, the only condition was that Satan did not threaten Job’s life. One by one all the most precious things are taken from Job; his crops fail, his animals perish, and his family are killed by disaster and sword. Job is distraught, but his faith in God doesn’t waver. Then his three friends come to comfort him. But they do a terrible job, calling God’s judgement into question and suggesting that these disasters have befallen Job because he has done wrong. Job becomes deeply distressed. His friends counsel him to confess, and then, and only then, everything will come right –or so they say. Job is driven into deeper and deeper self-examination, looking for anything that could explain why so many things have gone wrong.. God is furious, because he knows none of what has happened is Job’s fault, but has come from Satan and his desire to test Job’s faith. And so, towards the end of the book, after each of the so called friends have tried to persuade Job to admit his faults and submit to God, God speaks.

God not only speaks, he thunders! The language is poetic, but his intent is clear. Stop this introspection and look around you! Look at the whole of creation, where did it come from? Whose inspiration imagined it. Look at the amazing detail, consider the planning and the power required to put everything in its place and to sustain it.

He challenges Job and his friends to look at the whole of creation, everything they have seen and experienced. At the end of this long challenge to Job, God asks Job: Can you change the forces of nature and creation? And Job responds: ‘I know now that you can do all things, no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, too wonderful for me to know.’ My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Job 42:1-5

I wonder if there have ever been times when you have become so wrapped up in your own concerns, that you have lost sight of God?

It is sometimes easy to forget that God is powerful and to look away from ourselves and at his creation can redress the balance.

For many people, reconnection with the natural world has a beneficial effect on their mental health and their awareness of and love of God. Has this been your experience? How did you encounter a greater understanding of God through your encounter with his creation?

Let's listen to the song Who can know the mind of the Creator

Now we'll hear Canon Angela Tilby's. thought for the Day from Radio 4 from January 29th this year. Canon Tilby reflects on the growing problems and dangers to humanity caused by our changing climate. The Thwaites glacier in the Antarctic is melting at an increasing rate due to warmer sea and air temperatures. It currently contributes 4% to the current rise in the sea level, but if it melted completely it would raise the level of the sea by half a metre. Enough to flood many coastal areas around the world, including in the UK.

Climate scientists are convinced that these rises in air and sea temperatures are causing the increasingly severe weather conditions around the world and are giving rise to flooding in some places, extreme drought in others and the bush fires we have seen recently in Europe, The USA and Australia.

As far back as the 16th Century, Francis Bacon recognised that the exercise of human progress and dominion over nature frequently disrupts the relationship we have with the natural world. Science suggests that these changes are a result of human action. The forces of nature are, as the book of Job suggests, immensely powerful, and we can do little in the face of them, but human actions are causing dramatic and possibly, irreversible change to the world around us. And the consequences are frightening.

How might our Christian faith affect the way we respond to our world – God's creation that he loves?

It's tempting for us to think that our personal contribution to the climate (either positive or negative) won't have any lasting effect, but this could be seen as an abdication of responsibility. What do you think?

God has given us this world as a generous gift, not just for us in the West, but for all people of all generations to inhabit and enjoy. How might we live as stewards of his creation today?

Closing Prayers