

## Session 3

Welcome and opening devotions

Our theme for these sessions is creation. If I had asked you to bring something to contribute to a worship focus what would you have brought?

### **Psalm 104: 1-4, 14-27, 33-35**

*We read the passage once, then after a pause again. There will be space to speak any words or phrases which have spoken to us.*

*After the third reading, there will be opportunity to say why those phrases were significant.*

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul.

LORD my God, you are very great;

you are clothed with splendour and majesty.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment;

he stretches out the heavens like a tent

<sup>3</sup> and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.

He makes the clouds his chariot

and rides on the wings of the wind.

<sup>4</sup> He makes winds his messengers, <sup>[a]</sup>

flames of fire his servants.

<sup>14</sup> He makes grass grow for the cattle,

and plants for people to cultivate –

bringing forth food from the earth:

<sup>15</sup> wine that gladdens human hearts,

oil to make their faces shine,

and bread that sustains their hearts.

the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
 17 There the birds make their nests;  
 the stork has its home in the junipers.  
 18 The high mountains belong to the wild goats;  
 the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.  
 19 He made the moon to mark the seasons,  
 and the sun knows when to go down.  
 20 You bring darkness, it becomes night,  
 and all the beasts of the forest prowl.  
 21 The lions roar for their prey  
 and seek their food from God.  
 22 The sun rises, and they steal away;  
 they return and lie down in their dens.  
 23 Then people go out to their work,  
 to their labour until evening.  
 24 How many are your works, LORD!  
 In wisdom you made them all;  
 the earth is full of your creatures.  
 25 There is the sea, vast and spacious,  
 teeming with creatures beyond number –  
 living things both large and small.  
 26 There the ships go to and fro,  
 and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.  
 27 All creatures look to you  
 to give them their food at the proper time.  
  
 33 I will sing to the LORD all my life;  
 I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.  
 34 May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
 as I rejoice in the LORD.  
 35 But may sinners vanish from the earth  
 and the wicked be no more.  
 Praise the LORD, my soul.

This psalm begins and ends with praise to God.

The Psalm broadly follows the pattern of creation which we find in Genesis 1. (This would be much more obvious if we had read it all!) The Psalmist has taken a passage he knows and turned it into a song of praise to God.

Many of the hymns and songs we sing in church have used the Bible in this way. What hymns have helped you to remember passages of Scripture? Which hymns / songs help you to remember the glory of creation?

***We will sing one of them.***

Have you ever experienced a time of outdoor worship? How did the environment affect your awareness of God or your ability to worship?

Verses 14 and 15 and verse 23 point us not just to what God has done, but our work too. Wine and bread are made using those things which grow, but people have to do their bit too.

Harvest Festival services are one of the times in church when we consider the creation and the way we affect it and work with it. Are Harvest Festival services still relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? When we hold them, should the emphasis be mainly on thanksgiving to God, care for the earth, recognition of the work of food producers or awareness and support for the hungry either locally or globally? Why?

Should we hold other 'special' services to highlight issues around creation or our responsibilities within it? If so, what?

The Joint Public Issues Team (Methodist, Baptist and URC) are encouraging us to make a change in our living habits during Lent. They

They give various suggestions – one is to give up meat and dairy for these weeks.

A rural chaplain is critical. He writes, *'The animal welfare standards in meat and dairy production in this country are much higher than those found in other parts of the world, and our carbon footprint is considerably lower. Sadly by encouraging the reduction in consumption of these commodities, you will without doubt be adversely affecting the livelihoods of some of our farmers, who will cease production, thereby sucking in imports from abroad. ... farmers cannot turn off production for six weeks'*. (David Dutton) What do you think?

We have given consideration in earlier sessions to the things we can do personally to protect creation (eg recycling or reducing plastic). Today, we are thinking more structurally. The environment we see in the countryside is largely maintained by farmers. Is the government right to change the emphasis of farm payments from supporting cheap food production to encouraging environmental benefits?

Are there things that as a church we could and should be doing to support the local rural community and those who live and work in it?

**729    *Touch the earth lightly***

Closing devotions